Consortio

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Consortio

by kelex

Summary

Every Omega in the land is brought to the lord on the evening of their first heat. Lord Hannibal usually doesn't choose to exercise that right, but this night's offering is too much for him to pass up. A virgin Omega in his first heat, with brown hair, blue eyes, and a spirit that can't be broken.

Notes

The last chapter is getting split into two. Real life has delayed the last couple of chapters, but it should be done by Christmas.

Taken

The young Omega was brought in chains before Lord Lecter. His hands were cuffed behind his back, and a thick burlap blindfold was wrapped around his eyes. His clothes were torn, but not removed, and Hannibal could smell the slick and the heat coming off the Omega in waves. No wonder he'd been touched and rubbed, but not violated. He was in the throes of a strong first heat, and it was the law of the land that required Omegas in their first heats to be claimed by the Lord of the land.

"Take the blindfold off and leave us." He held out his hand and the key to the chains were placed into his palm, and the courtyard emptied.

As the blindfold came off, the young Omega was staring at the ground. Knee-high leather boots, black pants, a swirling cape, and then as he looked up, a white shirt with a blood-red sash, rough hands, a braid of brown hair with ashy streaks, a square-cut face, a bow-shaped mouth, and eyes that seemed halfway between kind and terrible.

"What is your name, Omega?" The lord's voice was musical, accented but pleasant to listen to.

"Will--William Graham," he said clearly, planting his feet and looking the lord square in the eye. "I am slave to no man."

"Slave, no. Turn around." Hannibal's hand fell on the young man's shoulder and helped turn him around, so that he could unfasten the heavy metal chains that connected the leather cuffs on his wrist. "But you do know why you are here."

"Yes. A right I do not recognize; *prima nocte.* No one should be forced to give up control of their bodies, not even to the lord of the land." Will's chin was raised in defiance as he turned back around to face the Lord.

Such a handsome picture the young Omega made, with his blue flashing eyes, upturned chin and tousled hair. His clothes were of good quality, which meant he probably had a decent enough upbringing. Decent enough to be outraged in spite of his body's needs, which he could smell with every breath. "Normally, I would agree with you; most in my care would tell you that I choose not to exercise my right when presented with an Omega in their first heat. There have been exceptions, rare, but even those I've chosen will tell you I am neither unpleasant nor cruel."

That might be a bit of a stretch; the few he'd chosen didn't exactly *like* being strapped to the breeding bench for days on end, but they were well-compensated afterwards from the treasury. In one case, he'd even interceded on behalf of the Omega to help arrange a beneficial mating.

Will was no less suspicious for having been told this ahead of time. Because he had also been told that he fit the type that the Lord had chosen before, and not to be surprised if he himself was chosen. "If you are not kind to all, then you are not kind."

Hannibal tilted his head in acknowledgment of Will's words. But they made no difference to him. "Then I am afraid I am unkind, Mister Graham, because I will not let you leave my keep tonight." He reached out and caught a handful of Will's hair, but did nothing more than inhale its fragrance before letting go. "You're deep into your heat, and you smell divine. I've smelled nothing but you since you were brought here." His tongue wet his lips.

"I don't--"

"You do. Your biology, your instinct does." Hannibal took William's hand and drew him further into the castle. "Your brain might not, but your body is your master, not your mind. For all of us, it is this way. For Alpha, for Beta, for Omega. When you are in your heat, your body changes. You begin to produce more slick than usual, the consistency changes. Your body is making ready to take on a mate, to accept his knot, and to create a hospitable environment for you to conceive children."

Will tried to pull away from Hannibal because yes, he knew this, but that did not mean he wanted any part of this. Because his body wanted to take the knot of an Alpha didn't mean *he* wanted to.

Hannibal wouldn't let him pull away. "If you are not serviced in your heat, it becomes more difficult, and you will become more desperate. You'll spend all hours of every day on your knees, or on your back, trying to find something that will fill the twitching hole between your cheeks and sate your hunger. But you will find nothing, unless you seek an Alpha's knot to take. Even now you can feel the need to be knotted, can't you?"

Will nodded, and hated that he was nodding. "Yes."

"You see? And let me ask you, there is no one selected for you yet?" Because if there was, his family would've been here to tell him so.

"No, I've not been mated."

"I thought not." But that was not a problem; he would be before the week was out. Now was not the time to deal with that, however. "Tell me something, Mister Graham, what is it you so openly detest about me? I do not intend to harm you; in fact I intend to give you something to ease the difficulty of your first heat--"

"I've never been knotted before," Will blurted out, his face flushing scarlet because he knew this was going to be the next question. Some families allowed their Omegas to knot with their Alphas before the Omega's first heat. It helped establish a bond between them, so that when the first heat came, the Omega would not be forced to deal with so many alien concepts.

Hannibal's eyebrows rose. "You have not." That was a surprise; he would have imagined that Alphas would've been sniffing around this boy for months before his heat actually hit. It explained, too, why this boy had such fear of what would be intently arousing. "That… explains a great deal and changes nothing. But do tell me, how did this come about?"

Will realized he was being led to the Lord's bedchamber, and even though he wanted to pull away, there was a lurch in his belly that felt like a hook drawing him in closer and craving

something he couldn't put into words. "My father is a fisherman and fish merchant; he has made our family prosperous and rich, but many others in the merchant guilds look down on him because he fished, he worked with his hands before he could afford to pay others to do it for him. He had no care to seek a mate for me in the guild, and such matings outside of the guilds are not usually done."

"And your mother? Where was she that she did not provide for her son?"

"My mother died when I was very young. I don't remember her at all. When my father is drunk, he says that she left us, but when he is sober, he says she is dead to him." Will dug his heels in outside the bedchamber door. "Please. Do not--I don't--please, my Lord."

Hannibal opened the door to his chambers. "You will call me Hannibal. Rather, you may if you wish." He didn't want to order the familiarity that he hoped would come soon. "Come in. Pour a drink if you'd like."

Will followed Hannibal into the spacious chamber. It would've been nearly the size of half of William's home, and this was where the Lord slept every night. A massive fireplace stood on one wall, and beside it a sideboard with several rough brown bottles, bread, meat, and plates. A wardrobe stood on the other wall, close enough to the fireplace to warm the dresser's nakedness when dressing, but not close enough to be too warm. It was in front of the wardrobe that Hannibal paused, swirling the cape over his shoulder to hang on a peg inside the wardrobe door. The red sash quickly joined it, and the knee boots were changed for slippers.

Will hesitated only a moment before heading to the sideboard. He reached for one of the glasses when Hannibal spoke softly. "If you would not mind, could you pour one for me as well, since you're pouring?"

The Omega felt his hands shaking as he poured, and the rim of the bottle chattered loudly against the lip of the glass. "Certainly, my lord--Hannibal." He downed his own in a single gulp, eyes watering as the rough alcohol poured down his throat, and handed the second full glass over.

"Thank you." Hannibal sipped from the glass as he sat in the chair. "Look by the bed, William, and tell me if you recognize that?"

The contraption was a luxuriously padded bench, the angle of which could be changed by the pulley handle beside it. There were two sets of chains and shackles, and a third large shackle near the top of the bench. "It's a breeding bench. I've seen them sold in the marketplace."

"Do you know what they are used for?"

"Yes. When an Oh--Omega is violent, or fights against his Alpha, they're strapped into the bench and bred into docility. Taking the Alpha's knot over and over again until they're unable to breathe, talk, feel, do anything except take what they're given." Will shuddered as he looked at the bench's thick padding and comfortable cuffs. "They hold you down, open and exposed."

Hannibal sipped his drink and listened. "They are also excellent in aiding conception, allowing the Omega to remain in perfect presentation until the knot is deflated and the Alpha's sperm has had a chance to work."

William closed his eyes and turned his back on it. "You're going to put me into that thing, aren't you?"

"Yes, eventually. Perhaps in the next two days. But for now, you and I can get to know each other. I would like for you to be comfortable with me, Mister Graham. Or do you prefer William?"

"Will is fine, or William." He was pulling at the neck of his tunic despite the drink, and he was looking towards the window already opened to let the cool night in.

"Are you feeling a bit warm?" Hannibal noticed the fidgeting and knew exactly what it meant.

"Yes." He wished he'd brought a fan. Most Omegas carried them for heat flashes during heats. "I'm sweltering."

Then it was time. Rising from the chair, Hannibal put his drink on the side table and crossed the room. He stopped by the bed, and held out his hand. "Come join me, William. There are things I'd like to show you before we begin." He wasn't at all hesitant about removing his shirt first, then sliding his slippers under the corner of the bed before draping his pants over his shirt, and both articles of clothing over the footboard.

William's throat tightened as he swallowed hard, his throat bobbling. As soon as Hannibal had taken off his clothing, a deep, musky scent had filled the room, and he couldn't help making a soft little noise in his throat.

Hannibal purred softly at Will's whimper. "Yes, that's the scent of an Alpha in rut; my scent, more specifically. When an Omega is in heat, and an available Alpha smells it, this is what happens. They scent as well, to let the Omega know that they are available to service your needs."

"I don't want my needs serviced," was Will's protest, even as he drew closer to Hannibal's beckoning hand.

"Perhaps not, but that is why they are called needs. You have no choice; you are an Omega, you are in heat, and you need that fulfillment." He waited until William was close, and then he brought the young man to the bed. "Will you let me disrobe you, Mister Graham?"

"Yes." The closer Will got, the better the smell. It was strong, heavy, and it made his mouth water. He felt his entrance growing slicker by the moment, and he was almost afraid it was going to stain his clothes. And when Hannibal asked to disrobe him, he meant to say no, until he saw the want in his eyes.

"Thank you." Hannibal's hands slid under the boy's tunic and pushed it up quickly. Perhaps later would be the time for slow foreplay, for kisses and caresses that teased as much as they

promised. His skin was smooth, well-tanned and well cared for, though his hands were those of someone who had worked. They were rough in places, with tiny cracks in the skin that snagged on the tunic's fabric as he pulled it off overhead.

His nipples were hard little pebbles in the cool air, and Hannibal brushed over them with his thumbs. The intimate touch made Will gasp, and he dropped his arms to cover his chest. "Wh--"

Hannibal was beginning to think this boy had been taught nothing at all about sex. "What did your father tell you of what would occur?"

Will couldn't help shivering, and he kept his arms crossed over his chest. "That I would probably be chosen because I favor the others you've chosen in the past."

"That much is true," Hannibal allowed, and he paused in undressing the boy for a moment. "I find that I am drawn to those with dark curls, blue eyes, and enough courage to stand up to me. You fit all that I require." He touched Will's hair again, gently tugging one curl out to fall over his forehead. "What else were you told?"

"That you would… would knot me, and he explained what that meant. You would have sex with me, and then your knot would tie us together for some time, and then I would be free to go." The red on his cheeks was spreading down his neck and onto his torso, and he regretted giving Hannibal permission to remove his clothes.

"I think he said you would be free. Because as my knot shrinks, yes, you will be released from contact with me. But it shall not be the only time I knot you, William." Not by a long sight. "You will be free to go if you wish at the end of your heat. Five days, perhaps a week." His nostrils flared. Probably closer to five days; the boy was well and truly in the middle of it. "By that time, perhaps you'll not wish to leave."

Will's mouth was dry. "And what if I conceive?"

"Then you will be declared my mate, and you will belong only to me. You will bear my children, and, should you bear an Alpha, they shall inherit everything I own." He touched Will's cheek gently, carefully. "You would have a good life; you would be consort to the liege, and your word would be law as is mine."

"And if I don't?"

Hannibal let his hand fall. "You will be sent home with a great dowry, and should you wish a match made, my intercession to ensure a successful mating. You would also be given the choice to stay as my mate or not."

"Bonding?" Will didn't drop his arms from his bare chest, but he was determined to know everything that Hannibal could tell him about his situation. He'd said that he appreciated those that could stand up to him, and that was all he was doing. Standing up *to* Hannibal, *for* himself.

"Perhaps that is something to be discussed later. When you are not afraid of me, or of what will happen between us." Hannibal didn't move, but he brought his hands to his naked hips. Will didn't budge either, and Hannibal inclined his head. "I would hope that you would also choose to bond with me at some point. Perhaps not right away, because that would be presumptuous."

Will didn't dare voice the scoffing noise that wanted to surface, but he wasn't able to keep his mouth shut. "Presumptuous? Forcing your will on someone and then tempting them with the next best thing to a royal life? And then assuming that if they do say yes, they'll eventually choose to care for you? I think you're being a lot more than presumptuous!"

Hannibal laughed, and that broke the solemnity that had seemed to fall over the moment. "Oh, William, I do enjoy you. I sincerely hope that you will choose to stay!" He wrapped an arm around the boy's neck and brought him forward, kissing his forehead. "Even if you do not, I hope you will at least become my friend. My home will always be open to you, so long as you are this forthcoming and honest." He brought his hands down to cover Will's. "You don't have to hide from me. I think you're beautiful."

The flush deepened, and he tried harder to hide behind his scrawny arms. "Beautiful is what you call a woman."

"Beautiful is what you call anything or anyone that moves your soul," Hannibal corrected. "Beautiful is what you call a flower that you've plucked because the petals are perfectly symmetrical. Beautiful is what you call a painting that makes you weep from the realism." He pulled on Will's arms, finally succeeding in uncovering his bare chest. "Beautiful is what you call someone standing in front of you, revealing everything to your hungry eyes and starving soul," he clarified, and he touched Will's chest, hand flat over his heart. "Beautiful is what you call this, this pumping beat that metes out life one tick-tock at a time. A metronome inside the body, keeping a primal rhythm, speeding up when more life is needed, slowing to savor the moments that should be drawn out forever." He brought Will's hand to his own chest, letting him feel the fast-pounding beat behind his breastbone. "I wish to savor you, but my metronome says otherwise."

Will felt his body all but *sizzle* when Hannibal touched him, and it was an electric jolt when he touched the Alpha. His body reacted embarrassingly; his nipples, already hard, pebbled into rock hardness. He was glad of his trousers, because he was instantly erect, and the slick wetness in his opening was flowing faster and heavier than before. Hannibal's skin was hot and firm, hair crinkling in all the right places. "Oh, God."

Hannibal had had a shrewd idea of what the exchanged touches were going to do to the boy, and he kept Will's hand on his chest. "Sssh, yes, I know. Let me help you." He used his other hand to unfasten the laces of the trousers, and pushed them off his hips.

Will shimmied to help the trousers slide down, and his free hand joined Hannibal's in pulling off his underwear. He was mortified to see a wet patch on the front of his underwear, and worse yet, a glob of shiny slick on the back of his underwear. "No, no, don't, don't," he pled, suddenly ashamed of his body's reactions.

He tried to bolt, but Hannibal was having none of it. He kept the boy in his place. "Don't be ashamed. Your body reacts to me, just as mine reacts to you." One hand drifted down to stroke his cock, knot already swelling at the base of the shaft, and he offered it to Will on display. "One smell of you in heat, and this is what you do to me." He brought the Omega's hand down to stroke his hardness. "Feel that. This is what will make you feel good." Will's fingers brushed the forming knot, and Hannibal moaned. "That is what will tie us together."

Will instantly dropped his hands and rubbed one across his stomach. "What do I do?" His own erection cried out for a touch and he palmed it, stroking across the head and jacking it once. "Hannibal, what do I do?"

"Get in the bed," he ordered, and nearly leaped in after him. The boy's slick would leak and stain everything, but he was content with that, because Will's scent was an aphrodisiac that he didn't intend to deny himself. "On your back, and let me see you, see all of you."

The sheets on the bed were finer than most of the clothes Will owned, and he was hesitant to get on the bed. But the urgency of his erection and the growling that issued from Hannibal's throat solved the matter, and he got easily into the bed. He'd barely had the chance to roll over before Hannibal was in the bed behind him, moving between his knees and pushing his legs open.

Hannibal was almost reeling from the smell of William's slick. He had never had this reaction to anyone else before, where their scent was more intoxicating than any mead or wine, where his desire to take and own was so full-blown before they'd barely exchanged names. He had to taste it; he thought that putting his face between William's thighs might spook him, and so he merely reached down with two fingers, prying open Will's cheeks and exposing his hole.

His anus was already open, red and swollen with need, slick and glistening and twitching to accept an Alpha's cock. But he was also a virgin, and Hannibal worked calmly as he could, the two fingers that had opened his cheeks pressing into Will's hole. He was tight, even with the slick and the instinctual relaxation of his muscles. And Hannibal stretched, two fingers and then three fingers, groaning softly and breathing through his mouth as he drowned in the scent of slick.

Will's fingers knotted in the sheets as he felt Hannibal's fingers penetrating him. It stretched, burning for only a moment. His physiology took over in a flash, the fingers making him crave much more than just the gentle stretching. He didn't know what he was yearning for, but he was certain that Hannibal was going to give it to him.

Fingers dripping with slick, Hannibal brought them to his mouth. A deep, satisfied groan as the syrupy discharge touched his tongue, and he wanted to dive back in and lick Will clean. There was no real taste that he could actually identify, only that it was delicious and addictive. His cock already ached, and his knot threatened to pop from just the taste of the boy.

"Hannibal, please!" Couldn't stop the cry from his throat, his entire body twisting to try and find a cool spot on the sheets for his already-overheated body. "Please, please!"

He lifted one of Will's legs over his shoulder, and rubbed the head of his cock over Will's leaking hole to cover himself with slick, and pressed in. "No need to beg, sweet William, I am here." Hannibal leaned forward, letting his weight drive his cock into Will's virgin opening.

The Omega gave an open-mouthed keen at the penetration, raising his hips to accept more of the length until Hannibal was completely sheathed. His knot rested just outside Will's entrance, already large and still growing. Full size was not far away, and he was determined to have Will come while the knot was penetrating, pleasure to disguise the discomfort. Hannibal's kiss covered Will's lips, and he swallowed the sharp noises into himself.

The deep strokes of Hannibal's cock was soothing to Will in ways he didn't understand. His leg wrapped around Hannibal's waist, pulling him in closer so that every thrust went in just a little bit deeper. The open-mouthed kiss wasn't enough; he needed another and his fingers left the sheets and tangled just as desperately in Hannibal's hair. "Please, please," he begged again, sucking on Hannibal's lower lip as he dragged his teeth over it. "Hannibal."

Will's eyes were shining with fevered need, and the soft pleas were driving him mad. Hannibal growled again, soothing Will's desperation with the assurance of an Alpha there to pleasure him. "I'm going to give you what you need," he promised, pressing wet kisses along his neck and jaw. He itched to bite and mark, to draw blood and proclaim that this Omega was his. But that was a choice for Will to make, and Hannibal contented himself with tasting every inch of skin that he could get his mouth on.

Will didn't realize he was rocking along on Hannibal's cock until he felt the mattress shift from the speed of his rocking and the strength he was putting into it. Hannibal's strength pressed him back down, riding him fast and hard. He couldn't help pushing back, wanting more, kissing harder. He bit down on Hannibal's lower lip and tasted blood, shuddering hard. Hannibal's blood had a dark, smoky undertone that matched the rutting scent pouring off him, and he sucked at the tiny tear until there was nothing left.

Hannibal was lost. He felt the bite tear his flesh, knew that Will was lapping at it, and groaned softly as he was devoured. Will's hands stayed in Hannibal's hair, demanding more attention, more kisses, deeper thrusts, and Hannibal's body moved to answer. There was barely room enough between them to breathe, and he let the leg on his shoulder fall to the bed so he could get closer. His bare chest pressed against Will's, hair scraping hairless skin as Will bucked against him. "Now, please, now, I need it, please, Hannibal, give it to me."

He couldn't stop himself; all his plans went right to hell as he drove in, his knot popping past the tight muscle and feeling it seal tightly behind him.

Will screamed at the breach, uncaring and unknowing because finally, finally he was full and complete, and the hot wash of Hannibal's orgasm pumped deep inside his body. He canted his hips up, urging Hannibal to work forward just a few centimeters deeper, just a little bit more.

Hannibal reached for Will's cock, stroking it as roughly as he'd fucked him. His knot throbbed as Will's body squeezed it, and he grunted savagely. The bite to his lip was tender and he used his tongue to pry it open, sharing another bloody kiss with the hungry Omega beneath him.

The second taste of Hannibal's blood, the hard seal of the knot inside him, the stroking of his cock, all elements combined together to shove Will over the precipice and into his first orgasm. A rush of heat, then an almost floating sensation of ecstasy as his entire body went lax.

Hannibal's knot was still firmly lodged in Will's body, and he sagged to the side. He lay face to face with the young Omega, their legs intertwined. Will's face was ruddy with exertion, and he was panting softly. Hannibal's fingers pressed his sweaty hair back from his face, and covered the damp skin with kisses.

Will's hand lifted and played with the sweat-damp ends of Hannibal's hair. The lord was equally disheveled, sticky and sweating and red-faced and panting, but it seemed natural for Will to initiate the kiss the time. Not for the blood, just for the kiss.

Hannibal let him explore lazily, fingers twining together and then apart as Will measured his hands against Hannibal's. His hands stroked over Hannibal's wide shoulders, down a rippling arm, feeling the taut power of Alpha musculature beneath tanned skin. He was delighted with every difference in their bodies, and he couldn't resist a tug at Hannibal's chest hair.

His earlier reservations seemed to have disappeared in the afterglow of his first knotting, and Hannibal took full advantage of it. He nuzzled into Will's neck, and lay there contently inhaling his scent. "Was it what you feared, sweet William?"

"No, it wasn't." Will's hand stroked the nape of Hannibal's neck, then down his back. "It's not the thing that I was afraid of at all. I don't know why I feared it."

"You didn't know." Hannibal shifted closer to Will, keeping him fully encircled. "When we're finished, I'll draw up a bath, and have a light dinner brought. Are you hungry?" He wanted to call him darling, dear, little pet, a thousand endearments he didn't have the right to use yet.

"Starving." His stomach growled lowly, and both men laughed. Will was flushed, a different pattern from the embarrassment before, and Hannibal slowly memorized the differences. He wanted to be able to know on sight if his Omega was ready for him. "Uh, Hannibal?"

"Yes?" He propped his head on his hand, so that he was looking down at Will's face.

"You're staring at me like you're going to devour me." Will gave an uneasy grin. "Did I… did I do something wrong?"

"No. No, you did everything right, and then some." Hannibal dipped his head and nuzzled into the crook of Will's neck again, and then tilted his head and invited Will to do the same. "I'm just thinking about you."

Will did as Hannibal had done, and inhaled. The wonderfully dark rutting scent had faded , though it had not disappeared, and beneath it was something delightfully masculine and male, and yet somehow almost delicate. Uncertain. "What…"

"You're scenting me," Hannibal explained, wondering how this precious thing had survived without being taught anything of who and what he was. "You're scenting the rut, and my

natural scent."

"What else?" Will demanded, taking another inhale. "It's barely there, but… it's tickling my nose. It makes me want to sneeze it out again."

"Uncertainty. You're full of it yourself." He brought Will's arm to his nose. "See? You'll smell the uncertainty on yourself as well."

Will did as he was told, and the same prickly scent came off his skin as it had off Hannibal's. "I don't like it."

"I'm not fond of it myself," Hannibal agreed. "But there are many things to be unsure about, little Omega." It slipped, but it felt completely natural and so he did not realize it. "Neither of us is quite certain of the other yet, and so that leaks from our pores as naturally as anything else."

"Make it go away." He was almost pouty, and he couldn't verbalize why.

Hannibal knew why. He was reacting like a claimed Omega, expecting his Alpha to fix everything to his liking. A soft growl rose in his chest, because this was something he could not fix. "It will go away naturally, I promise. The longer we are together, the more you will come to know me, and I will come to know you. The uncertainty will pass."

The soft growl sent a warm pulse through William's body, and he clenched around Hannibal's knot. That single pulse kept it from deflating too soon, and he scooted in absolutely as close to Hannibal as he could get. "I believe you."

Yes, he did. The bond of trust between a claimed Omega and his Alpha was already flowering, because he felt it as much as William did. "I know you do, little Omega."

William purred at the nickname, and was surprised to hear an answering rumble in Hannibal's chest. "What--"

"Nothing. Alphas have certain reactions to Omegas outside of the sexual ones, and that is one. Certain reflexive sounds you make are answered or echoed by your Alpha. Even though I am not your Alpha, because we are knotted together, there are certain… associations." Hannibal watched as William turned that answer over in his mind, and came to a satisfied conclusion.

"So… I purr, and you purr. I whine, and you growl. I scent, and you get hard. Is there anything else I should know?" Will couldn't help the saucy tone in his voice; he felt at ease with Hannibal in a way he hadn't before, which probably had a lot to do with the fact Hannibal was still knotted to him.

"Yes, there's a great deal more you should know. But that is why you'll stay with me, yes? Because I can teach you what you don't know, and how to use what you do, and maybe you will find a mate of your own, if you don't choose to stay with me." He had to throw it in there, but he knew it would break the mood.

It did. Will closed himself off again at the thought of staying trapped with Hannibal, and though they were knotted together, he tried to put some space between them. "Hannibal--"

"I'm sorry, I should not have said what I did. Please, forgive me." That was exceptional, even if Will didn't know it, because the lord of the land apologized to no one.

"It's fine. I just… can we not talk about that? Or, you know, *that* thing," he added, with a nod towards the breeding bench. He'd forgotten about it until now, and he remembered Hannibal's promise that this would not be the only time they knotted. "Please?"

"Of course, as you wish." He stroked Will's cheek, but didn't say anything else.

"Thank you."

They lay together in silence, facing each other without saying another word, until Hannibal's knot finally deflated enough for them to move. Will sat up on the side of the bed, and Hannibal went into the bathroom to roll out the tub. He pushed it to sit in front of the fireplace, so that it would be warm, and pulled the velvet rope that would summon servants to fill it. "As soon as the tub is filled, you're welcome to use it. My wardrobe is yours, please dress in whatever you're most comfortable in, and I'll arrange to have your clothing cleaned and more obtained in your size." Hannibal withdrew a blood-red dressing gown out of the wardrobe, and tossed it to Will. "In case you don't want to be naked when the servants come in."

Will quickly shrugged into the luxurious garment, belting it around his waist and folding the sleeves back. Hannibal was pulling a black one over his shoulders, and the ties barely closed around his chest. "Thank you, Hannibal."

Hannibal shook his head as he bent to pick up his slippers. "Don't thank me yet, little Omega. You'll be sleeping in here with me, I hope that is acceptable to you."

A quick look around revealed no other beds, and Will figured out very quickly what the sleeping arrangements were going to be. "I don't have a problem with that."

"Good. Then while you're soaking, and I do suggest you do so, you'll likely be stiff and a little sore, I'll be in the kitchens getting you something to eat." The chamber door opened, and the first in a stream of servants carrying steaming buckets of water entered. "This is Master William, and he's to be treated with all respect to the station."

The serving girl's eyes widened, because she knew what that meant. Sneaking a glance at the young boy in the red robe, she poured out her bucket and left the room to spread the news that Master Hannibal had himself a husband.

End

Teach

Chapter Summary

Hannibal introduces Will to the world of Alpha and Omega, explaining everything that he can to the Omega so he can make his choice informed. Including an introduction to the breeding bench, how an Alpha treats his claimed Omega, and what Will's role would be if he chose to stay with Hannibal.

A parade of servants came in and out of the Master's bedchamber, all of them carrying buckets of hot water to fill the tub. Will watched, carefully, and didn't notice the same face twice. He did notice they looked at him, very casually, while adding their buckets, making sure not to stare. He had pulled the scarlet dressing gown tightly around him, and was really wondering when Hannibal was going to come back.

Finally, everyone had left except for a decrepit old man, who had to be close to a hundred if he was a day. "Come, Master, your bath is ready."

William shook his head violently. "I am not your master."

The old man's chuckle was a dry rasp in his throat. "You are the master of every soul in this castle, and I'm proud to bend my neck to you." And he did so, bowing in front of William. "Come, you'll need to wash yourself, his Lordship requested a hot soak for you. Won't do for it to get cold now. "

Sighing deeply, Will got up from his curl on the bed, and padded over to the tub. His feet were cold, and he was grateful for the rug by the fireplace that warmed his cold toes. "Uh, thank you, I can… I can take it from here."

"Nonsense." The old man took the robe from Will's shoulders in a single pull, leaving him naked. "I'm going to hang this up now, and I'll be back to help you wash."

Will all but dove into the tub, striving to hide his nakedness in the comfortably hot water. It pinked his skin, turning it a rosy warm hue, and he wanted to relax. Instead, he kept his arms and legs crossed so as to maintain his modesty.

He heard the dry, raspy chuckle again. "Isn't no need for you to be so shy, Master. We've all seen his Lordship down to his bare arse."

"And there's no need to advertise that fact, thank you, Lazlo." But Hannibal's tone was more amused than anything else, and when Will peeked, there was obvious affection for the old servant. "I think I'm capable of handling the young man from here."

"Of course you are, Lordship." Lazlo's innuendo was just barely this side of subservient, but he left without further ado.

"Lazlo has been my body servant since my youth. As such, he receives a good deal more latitude than my other servants, and I am quite fond of the man." Hannibal knelt by the tub, and laid a long tray across it. "Here, I hope that this is to your liking."

To his liking.

Will was surprised at the food on the tray. It ranged from basic toasted bread with cream butter and honey to what appeared to be half a roasted game bird, to lightly fried eggs and a bit of pork sausage, a plate of cheeses that he'd never seen before, fresh fruit that almost no one but the lord could afford, and silver utensils. A matching goblet was sitting empty on the corner of the tray, and Hannibal brandished a bottle of wine from the keep's vineyards.

"If you don't prefer wine, there is mead available, and water, and tomorrow, the first pressings of apple cider will be complete and ready to taste," Hannibal added quietly, remaining on his knees by the tub to see if his offering was going to be accepted.

"Wine is fine, thank you." Will was more than a bit taken aback, but since the bedroom was empty, he relaxed in the tub, careful not to dislodge the tray with his knees. He watched in silence as Hannibal carefully uncorked the wine and swirled it under his nose, inhaling the fragrance before pouring Will's cup full of the deep red vintage. "Uh, Hannibal?"

"Yes?" He set the open bottle to the side, and looked up at Will's face with sincerity, expression schooled to neutrality, so he thought.

In truth, Will was shivering from the way Hannibal was looking at him. It seemed as if Hannibal were trying to memorize him, or devour him. It was intense, being the sole focus of such heavy attention, and he could feel practically every iota of it. "What are you doing?"

"Feeding you. You'll need to eat after your first experience," he said, choosing the words carefully to keep the Omega calm. "You'll need to soak away some of the aches and pains that come with a first time, and you'll need to regain your strength." Taking an apple from the tray, he picked up the silver knife and started to peel the red skin away, revealing the snowy white fruit beneath. He quartered, then quartered again, until he had eight little slender pieces of apple, and he held one up to Will's lips.

"I can feed myself." But he parted his lips anyway, and let Hannibal slide the apple slice onto his tongue. His teeth crunched the fruit loudly, and he reached for another slice himself. Hannibal beat him to it, and again, held it up to his lips. They parted without comment, and Hannibal slowly fed the entire apple to the Omega. Will felt decidedly sinful, being fed by hand while soaking in a tub big enough for two people, with a never-emptied cup of wine at his fingertips.

After the apple was gone, Hannibal used the fork to feed Will most of the cheese, a cube at a time. Then he moved the tray away. "Let me wash you before the water gets too cold, and then we'll finish eating." Hannibal rose to his feet just enough to discard the clothing he'd put on, and knelt nakedly by the tub again. "Don't be afraid."

Because Will had immediately pulled back into himself at the mention of being bathed, and even more at the sight of a fully naked Hannibal kneeling beside him. "I can wash myself, too."

"Yes, but you'll let me, won't you?" Hannibal dipped his hand into the warm water, letting it trickle over William's shoulders and back. "Please? I would enjoy it very much." His cupped hand didn't stop pouring while he was waiting for Will's answer. He told himself that if Will chose, he'd leave the Omega alone, but he didn't think that he could.

The fall of water on his skin was almost mesmerizing, and he closed his eyes to feel it. When nothing else was forthcoming, no touching, just the gentle tapering drizzle of water over his body, he nodded. "Yes. I'll let you." Because he could feel Hannibal trying to earn his trust by not touching, not exploring what was clearly visible in the water, and he felt the need to reward it.

Hannibal took the cloth and soap that had been left on the corner of the tub and soaked the rag and bar in the water, building up a thick lather. He started with Will's hand, washing each individual finger and the palm before resting it on his shoulder. He scrubbed Will's forearms carefully, then the soft inside of the elbow, then up the bicep to the shoulder. He drizzled water from his hands to rinse the soap from Will's skin, and he fought the urge to nuzzle into soft skin already starting to scent for sex again. "Lean forward," he murmured softly, and he let Will's clean arm drop back into the water as he started to scrub over the lean expanse of his back.

There were scars, and Hannibal wanted to touch them. To find out the stories behind them. So he did half of it; he asked. "What happened? Here, I mean," he asked, washing over one somewhat round looking scar near the top of Will's shoulder.

"I was shot. By accident, I think, but I was working on the beach with my father's boat, and I felt the bullet. It was… I think the doctor called it through and through, so there was nothing left behind except a hole." He shrugged. "The one on my arm is from a fishing hook that caught," he added, turning to show. "The marks of a life lived working."

Hannibal supposed that was meant as a jab towards him. "I have my own scars, which I hope you will discover in time," is all that he said. He continued washing Will in silence, careful not to dip or delve too far beyond what he was being allowed to touch. "Here, I don't think you want me going any further," he said, and offered the soap to Will. "I'll set your towels by the fire to get warm."

He moved fluidly, Will couldn't help noticing, as he rose to his feet and carried the two woolen towels to hang by the fire. Then Hannibal came back for the tray, and Will caught his wrist, still sitting in the tub. "Why are you doing this, Hannibal? Really."

"Because you are my Omega. At least for the moment," he added quickly, staving off the anticipated upset. "And I am your Alpha. My instincts are, as I have said, to fulfill your needs and make certain that you are taken care of. The extent to which I take those instincts are up to me; every Alpha reacts differently. A bonded Alpha might well choose his Omega's clothes, prepare his meals by hand, or anything else he feels necessary. I prefer to spoil my Omega, as I have the means." He stayed still by the edge of the tub, until Will released him,

and only then did he move to pick up the tray. He carried the tray back to the bed, and set it safely on the mattress, then moved the goblet and wine bottle to sit securely on the table beside the bed. "When the towels are warm, I'll bring them to you."

"I can get them." Will rose dripping from the tub, firelight rippling across his skin. Hannibal couldn't help himself; he growled softly, arousal leaking from his pores as he watched Will move.

Will heard the growl, and his stomach clenched, and he felt his body reacting. A loosening, somewhere in his muscles, and he caught himself on the mantle over the fireplace. His back was arched unconsciously as his body tried to display itself to entice the closest Alpha. A soft whimper escaped Will's throat, and he grabbed the towels with almost blindness as he dragged the warm cloth up to his face, and then down the front of his body.

Hannibal was at his side by the time he was finished. "Give it to me." He took the second warm towel and got on his knees behind Will, starting at his ankles and moving up his body. His nostrils flared, smelling Will's heat-scent, and he licked between Will's cheeks. "Please, William."

"What do you want me to do?" He was warm in front of the fire, and he was already edgy because of his heat. Hannibal's touch, the growling from his throat, and he turned to face the mantel entirely.

"Just stand here." Hannibal rose, guiding both of Will's hands to brace on the rough wood mantle, and he pulled Will's hips backwards, until he was stretched the length of his torso. His hands slipped between Will's thighs, pushing them apart until Will's cheeks parted to reveal his opening. Already glistening with slick, Hannibal drove his tongue into the tight little hole.

"Hannibal!" His nails dug into the wood and a different flushing took over his skin. The slick flowed from his opening, and it didn't seem to deter Hannibal in the least. His tongue was pushing in, licking and thrusting hard. His fingers pulled Will's cheeks further apart so that he could go deeper, his tongue rolling in an attempt to get as deeply into Will as he could. His face was shiny with Will's slick, the fragrance pushing him to go harder and deeper with every breath that he took. "Hannibal, please, I need more. Hannibal please, more."

Though he was reluctant to stop, the begging of his Omega--and Will was *his* Omega, whether the boy knew it or not--was something that Hannibal could not deny. He didn't bother to wipe his face clean, but he did pull Will away from the fireplace. "I'm not going to take you against the wall like an animal." He stroked over Will's hips, his arms, his shoulders, guiding him back to the bed and pushing him onto it.

The tray got pushed to the floor, and the dishes broke. Hannibal didn't care, and at the moment, neither did William. The boy rolled onto his back, dragging Hannibal down on top of him, but Hannibal caught his wrists. "No. Trust me. Roll over, up on your knees."

Will moved, getting on his knees and moaning softly. He realized that this position exposed himself to Hannibal quite thoroughly, and he lowered his head onto the pillows.

Hannibal moaned softly, a harsh breath hissing out between his teeth. William was offering himself, unknowingly, but still offering himself to his Alpha, and Hannibal's lips pulled away from his teeth. He wanted to mark the boy, bite and shake and leave no doubt as to who Will belonged to. But he forced a calmness he didn't feel, and dragged his nails lightly over Will's skin. "Are you ready?" he asked, seeing the answer for himself in the pulsing hole, the dripping slick, the heavy scent.

"Yes!" Will couldn't bring himself to say more than that, but he lifted his hips just a little more in invitation.

That was all Hannibal required, and he growled as he lunged forward. The length of his cock speared into Will in a single stroke, which made the young man cry out. "No!"

Hannibal tried to soothe him, but his instincts were howling. "Ssh, I'm sorry, it will be all right in a moment." That was all he could promise, as he held still enough to let Will's body grow accustomed to him.

The scream had been a reflex, because even as Hannibal was trying to be still and comfort him, William was wriggling under him, trying to pull more in, seeking a knot that was beginning to form. His body wanted more, a harder, deeper penetration, and even though there had been discomfort, it was gone almost as fast as it had hit, and he was ready for Hannibal. "Please."

Kissing the back of Will's neck was as close to marking as he would let himself do, but his hands dug into Will's hips and hauled him back as he snarled softly. His cock throbbed, sliding in and out of Will's wet passage as easily as breathing. Will was whimpering, and the slap of flesh against flesh was loud in the bedroom. His arms braced against the headboard, and he pushed back against Hannibal's rough thrusts in. "More, I need more, I need you, Hannibal, please."

Will was babbling, begging, and Hannibal's body was itching to give it to him. He knew what Will wanted; the sharp bite of Alpha teeth sinking into the back of his neck, a shake of submission, a mark bitten on the side of his neck to show he was taken. But Hannibal couldn't give him that yet.

Instead, he pressed another kiss to the back of Will's neck, growling softly and leaving marks that would later become bruises on Will's hips. His knot was growing, Will's opening was squeezing his cock tightly and encouraging him to tie. One arm wrapped around Will's waist, hauling him back so that his ass was flush against Hannibal's groin, and Hannibal grunted softly as his knot popped in and inflated. Though he couldn't pull out, he rocked his hips, thrusting shallowly inside Will's body until the orgasm came.

Will's hand was on his cock. He hadn't asked, nor had he been told, but as Hannibal's knot pressed in, he grabbed his own shaft and started to stroke, just as Hannibal had before. He tossed his head back, exposing his neck, and Hannibal's mouth zeroed in on the exposed skin, kissing and sucking hard on pale skin, leaving behind a bruise that would fade, rather than a mark that would claim.

Hannibal's hand joined Will's on his shaft, and together, they stroked him a blinding orgasm. Hannibal felt Will's exhaustion in the rubbery limbs and sagging body, and quickly lowered him to the bed, lying side by side and tucked in together as Hannibal's knot showed no signs of deflation. Hannibal let his fingers trail over Will's skin, sucking tiny kisses out of random spots. The slick had dried on his face, and it was all he could smell of Will. "Perhaps we'll need to revisit the bath," Hannibal said softly, and was rewarded by Will's gentle laugh.

"Is it always like this?" Will was looking at his own hands, and lifted his head when Hannibal's arm stretched out to pillow it. Then he looked at Hannibal's hands; larger, older, more calloused than his own, and he remembered how they had felt inside him the first time.

"What do you mean?" Hannibal barely wanted to breathe for fear of disturbing Will's exploration, because it was the first he'd done of his own free will.

"Desperate," he confessed after a moment, rubbing his thumb over a callous on Hannibal's hand. "It felt like--still feels like--if I don't have… you know, you. Your knot. That it's going to eat me alive."

Hannibal offered a comforting kiss to his shoulder, but didn't push when he flinched away. "Yes. To a certain extent, it is always going to feel like that. But once you are bonded, the intensity does lessen. You no longer have to worry that you will not attract an Alpha to serve that need. You will have one that you care for and trust, and your needs will be met. That desperation will fade into a wanting, but it will never go away completely. Right now, you are not bonded, and your body's instincts know that. And so it goes as hard as your body can stand to attract an Alpha and meet the need. You have me, yes, but you and I do not share a bond." Yet. "And until you find your mate, your body will always act as if you have no Alpha willing to serve you."

"Serve me. You keep saying serve me, serve that need." Will tried to look over his shoulder at Hannibal, but he wasn't able to completely turn around because of the knot still holding them together. He could feel his body massaging it every so often, and it would give an answering pulse. "Why do you keep saying that? I don't want to be serviced like some carriage in need of repair."

"Sssh." Gentle strokes to his arm and through his hair. "It isn't just your physical needs. When you are in heat, an Alpha knows your body is making ready to bear children. The response to that is to care for you in every way. Make sure you are fed, clothed properly, bathed properly, and generally have no care in the world other than to conceive."

"Is that…" Will stopped mid-thought. Hannibal had made sure there were clothes for him in the wardrobes, had drawn a hot bath, brought food with his own hands and fed it to him. He had twice knotted Will, when his heat made it impossible to resist the Alpha, and had not forced it any other time. Perhaps there was something to what Hannibal was trying to explain.

Hannibal waited patiently for Will to speak again. When he didn't, he guessed the question on Will's lips. "Yes, that's why I have been doing the things for you that I have been. Not only because it gives me personal pleasure to see you taken care of, but because I feel it necessary, and one feeling gives rise to the other. If I didn't feel it necessary to take care of you, I would

not gain pleasure from it." That was, for the sake of discussion, a lie. He would have gotten pleasure out of caring for Will no matter what. But that was nothing he needed to tell the boy now, only to frighten him again.

"Yes." He felt Hannibal's knot deflating slowly, and felt a vague sense of loss as his flaccid cock slipped out. "I'm sorry, I didn't have anyone else to ask. I feel like… I'm lost. I don't know what is going on with you, with me, with anything."

Hannibal nodded. "I understand, and that is why you and I are spending this time together. I want to teach you everything that you need to know, so that you make informed choices about your life." He rested a hand on Will's shoulder, and was glad to see that he didn't flinch this time. "I do not want to take advantage of you, William." He wanted the boy to trust him, to want him, to want to bond with him, and taking advantage of his innocence was not the path.

"I know." Once he was free, Will turned over so that he was facing Hannibal, his head still resting on Hannibal's arm. "Why do you--Alphas--bite?"

Hannibal smiled, his sharp teeth barely showing. "To mark. On the side of your neck, here," he said, touching the unmarred skin lightly. "This shows that you belong to someone. It can be on either side," he added, brushing over the bruise still forming. "A bruise, like this, is nothing. But the mark of teeth, the scar of teeth, that is permanent. It shows you have been claimed by an Alpha." His hand slipped to the back of Will's neck, but didn't exert any pressure. "Here, an Alpha bites to fulfill an Omega's need to present to his Alpha. A bite, a gentle shake, confirms to the Omega's instinct that the Alpha is taking care."

William studied on that for a moment, and felt the warmth of Hannibal's hand on the back of his neck. He licked his lips, leaning forward and pressing them against Hannibal's.

Hannibal closed his eyes at the uncertain kiss from the Omega. He didn't want to force it, and kept the kiss chaste and quiet until Will's tongue peeked between his lips. Hannibal's lips parted, and suddenly William was hungry. Starving and he rolled on top of Hannibal, straddling his hips and kissing him deeply. "Hannibal."

"Yes?" The kiss broke, and Hannibal looked up at the Omega, staring down at him with something like trepidation.

"Is this okay? I just…"

"Of course it is. You're allowed to do whatever you like, and you don't need permission. This is for you, little Omega, not me." He brought one hand up and rested his hand on Will's cheek, rubbing a thumb over his lips. "What is it?"

"I wanted to kiss you. When we were together before, I wanted you to bite me. I think I still do." His toes curled, and his hands braced on Hannibal's shoulders. "But you didn't."

"I wanted to. I didn't. Until you've chosen, you are not mine. And if I marked you, then I would be taking that choice away from you, which I refuse to do. You deserve to make that choice with a clear head not clogged by your heat and my scent. When the end of your heat

comes, I will ask you a question. If you choose then to stay as my mate, then and only then will I claim you, and you will bear my mark here." He touched Will's neck on the left side, right above the beating of his pulse. "No one else bears that mark in the world. No one else ever will."

Will ran his fingers over the unmarked skin, trying to imagine what the scar of a bite mark would feel like under his fingertips. He felt the heat of Hannibal's skin, the rough prickle of tiny, invisible hairs, the not-quite-toughened texture of his hands. When Hannibal's hand took his, Will didn't flinch. "What?"

"That is only half of the ceremony," Hannibal explained, and was inwardly thrilled when Will did not pull away. "You will also claim your mate in the same way." He brought Will's hand to the side of his neck, letting him feel the unblemished skin. "You will leave a bite on your chosen mate, for all the world to see. It will scar, in the shape of your teeth, and it will tell any Omega that sees it that your Alpha is claimed. They might try to approach, but have faith in your bond. Once you and your Alpha are marked together, you are forever bound, loyal and faithful."

"But not always." Will frowned, thinking of the mother who had deserted her alpha and her child.

"No, not always," Hannibal conceded. "But a true bond, a deep bond? It may bend, stretch, and splinter, but it will never break. An Alpha may stray, but he will always return to his Omega, contrite and seeking forgiveness. An Omega may leave, but he will always return to his Alpha, empty and wanting. When you are bonded with your mate, you will feel them inside of your head. The stronger the bond is, the stronger the feelings are. There are stories of the old days, when the bonds were first discovered, that true mates could speak to one another in their minds, so attuned to each other they were. But nobody believes those stories any longer."

Will was quiet, listening to Hannibal speak and exploring the soft skin of his neck and throat. He was finding everything overwhelming, and he gently tightened his fingers on the back of Hannibal's neck. His heartbeat was speeding up, and he was feeling the urge to run away, far away, and hide in the woods for the rest of his life.

"Ssh." Hannibal could feel the racing of Will's heart, and he pulled the young Omega against him, stroking his back gently and offering comfort.

"No, no, please, let go." Will's panic was looming, and though the comfort being offered was nice, he felt choked by it.

Hannibal released Will quickly, and the Omega jumped out of the bed. He was trying not to bolt and run, Hannibal could see it, and he could smell the boy's panic. "Will, listen to my voice," Hannibal said calmly. "You are safe here. You do not have to flee; this is a safe place for you." He got out of bed, picked his way carefully around the broken tray, and made it to the wardrobe, where Lazlo had hung Will's dressing gown.

He brought the robe over and draped it around Will's shoulders, tying it closed around his waist.

Will clutched the garment like a lifeline, hiding himself behind the voluminous folds. Hannibal stepped away, going for his own robe and dressing as quickly as possible. "Will, I want you to hear me. You've got nothing to be afraid of here." He kept his voice calm and soothing, making an effort to stay calm and emit the most calming scent he could think of. He stayed close enough to Will that he could stop him from bolting, but not close enough to crowd him.

"I know, I know, it's just too much to think about." Mating, bonding, marking, Alphas and Omegas, giving his life away forever, and he was quietly--not so quietly--freaking out about it. Will wished he'd never been born an Omega, that he'd been born an Alpha or a Beta, anything but this. He reached out blindly.

Hannibal was there, and he put his hand in Will's. Immediately the Omega grasped onto it, squeezing it hard and feeling the solidity there. The clothes helped; the intimacy of nakedness hadn't helped the situation at all, but both of them dressed, or dressed enough, helped to calm his heart. He stepped in closer, pulling Hannibal's arm around his waist.

Edging in closer, Hannibal put both his arms around Will's waist, sliding one hand up and down his back. "I am sorry that you are overwhelmed," he apologized softly. "If I had the choice, I would not have told you everything at once, but you and I have only a few days." He kissed the side of Will's head gently, and then carefully let him go. Will pulled him back again, just for the arms around him. "Forgive me."

"It's not your fault." Will was finding more comfort and relaxation in Hannibal's arms than he expected.

No, it wasn't, and yet, Hannibal was an Alpha, and he wanted to fix everything that was troubling his Omega--because in his mind, he had already claimed Will for his own. He didn't know what was going to happen when the boy's heat ended in a handful of days, because if Will tried to leave, Hannibal wasn't sure he could let him.

"…is that all right?"

Hannibal blinked; he'd completely missed the question. "I'm sorry, Will, I was attempting to think of something to make this easier for you, and I didn't hear what you asked."

The confession made Will give a halfway sad smile; it was obvious Hannibal had been thinking about him, because he hadn't been blinking as he'd stared deeply into Will's eyes. "I said, I feel like I need your knot again but I don't think I can handle the bed right now, is that all right?"

"You realize what you're asking, Will." Hannibal turned so they were both looking at the breeding bench by the fireplace.

"I know. I've been dreading it since I heard about it, hating it since I saw it, but I can't help thinking I need it." And that cost him dearly to admit it. "I… I like being with you, Hannibal, and it feels right, natural, being tied with you, but so much of this, I hate. I feel like I want to be bonded to someone, but I hate the idea of being owned. Because even though you don't say it, that's what it is. I want your teeth in my neck, but I can't stand the thought of thinking

I'm your property." Will's grip on Hannibal tightened, and their fingers were so tightly linked it was on the edge of painful. "I want everything you give me, but I hate what comes along with it. I want you, but I don't want to." Sweat was popping out on his body again, with the nearness of his Alpha, because that is what Hannibal felt like. His Alpha. "When you're close to me I can't think, and when you're not near, I feel lost, empty."

"Tell me what you want, little Omega, and I'll see to it that you have it." Hannibal kissed the back of Will's neck, nuzzled into his hair, offered the comfort of his body in any way Will wanted to take advantage of it.

Will turned, putting his back to the bench and his face in Hannibal's shoulder. "I want it to stop, Hannibal, I want to be myself again."

Hannibal's hand pressed against the back of Will's head, holding him close and steady. "In a few days, you will be. And until then, you are free to use me however you like to ease your suffering," he offered. "Bench or not. I don't care. You need to have your head as clear as possible--"

Will cut him off by kissing him. He couldn't hear anything else, because Hannibal was offering himself up for Will's comfort, and he was thinking that no one else would've done that, and really, Hannibal deserved a kiss for being patient and kind. So Will kissed him. He shivered in Hannibal's arms, pulling himself in closer and closer. "I need you, Hannibal."

Hannibal took control of the kiss, his hands rising to cup Will's face and splay gently across his cheeks. "You can have me. On the bed, you can ride me, just as you were before. We can put you on the bench, we can try it face to face again, or on your knees. Tell me, William, what you want, and I will give it to you." He was desperate to help, desperate to make certain that Will's needs were being met. "Please, let me help you."

For the first time, Will was beginning to understand that Alphas--that *Hannibal*--was just as trapped, just as much a slave to his instincts as Will himself was, and that realigned many things for him. He realized that Hannibal *needed* to help him, just as much as Will *needed* to be helped.

He realized that Hannibal wasn't bonded to him. Wasn't mated to him. Had no reason to be this conscientious about caring for Will except he wanted to. *Needed to.*

"Help me," Will whispered. "Please, Hannibal."

Hannibal growled softly and pulled Will against him, snug and close and careful. Then he swept Will off his feet and carried him to the breeding bench. He'd meant for their time together to happen on the bed, again, instead of the bench, but it would've ended here anyway. "I have you, little Omega. I will take care of you."

Will's stomach clenched as he climbed onto the padded bench. Hannibal's hands were sure and unyielding, gentle as he clasped the silk-padded cuffs around his wrists, and his ankles. He was face down on the bench, and Hannibal came around to the front for another kiss. "Too tight?"

A tiny shake of his head. "They're fine, I think." He didn't know what fine was, and blushed hard. He sucked his lip between his teeth, and Hannibal kissed it, pulling it back out again and sucking it himself. "Hannibal…"

"You don't want to conceive, do you?" Hannibal asked softly.

"Not right now." Will clenched his hands into fists as he lay spread-eagle on the bench. "Not like this." But even as he said it, his body was relaxing in a different way than before. He could almost feel his body opening up on the inside, muscles relaxing and stretching as he was flooded with slick. "But I think my body has other ideas."

"Yes," is all Hannibal could say. The scent of Will's slick was heavy in the air, almost cloying and choking in its sweetness. Intellectually he knew what was happening, but he was having a hard time pushing his instinct to the side to explain it to his little Omega. Taking a deep breath didn't help, because every bit of Hannibal's instinct was already raging. He put a hand on Will's shoulder, stroking gently. "Your body recognizes this. The breeding benches are treated with an Alpha's rut after it is purchased; it is saturated with it so an Omega cannot help but become excited when they're put into it." The contact of skin against skin helped, because he could just barely scent Will's panic, and it helped to ground him.

He didn't say that if they mated, if they bonded, he'd happily burn the goddamn thing because it would no longer be needed. He couldn't imagine using it on Will ever again. Not the way he was choked up and panicking.

Hannibal's explanation was not making things any better. At all. Will was slick, open and waiting, body taut as a bowstring as he listened to Hannibal's voice. He was beginning to trust the man, and listening to him made… in this case, no difference. "Please stop." Will wanted to grab Hannibal's hands, pull them onto his body, but when he tried, all he could do was rattle the chains attached to the cuffs. "Please."

"I'm sorry." Hannibal leaned in and kissed Will again, peppering his face with smaller, tiny kisses as he pressed his mouth to Will's lips and whispered against them. "You don't have to do this, William."

"I need to try it." Will pressed his head against Hannibal's neck, and Hannibal moved in closer so that he could give Will as much contact as he could on the bench. "Thank you, Hannibal."

It occurred to Hannibal that they had barely been together for a full night; the sun had not yet risen, and they would both need sleep and food soon. It seemed like days, weeks, years, eternities that he'd been caring for his little Omega, and that was stunning. He'd never lost track of time before.

He kissed Will's neck, scraping his teeth lightly over Will's skin. His Omega gave a sharp cry, and whimpered into Hannibal's skin. "Don't tease."

The cry is what he'd wanted to hear; he knew that Will--at least in the moment--wanted to belong to him. He moved behind Will on the bench, lifting the red robe that had given him comfort before, and checked the strap around Will's waist. It was firm, but not tight, and

would let him move if necessary. Slick was dripping down the insides of Will's thighs, and Hannibal slid his cock through the drips before pushing the head into Will's opening.

Will sobbed as Hannibal entered him. His breath caught in his throat as he was penetrated, deeper than before in a single thrust. He could feel Hannibal's knot pressing against his opening already, his testicles bouncing against Hannibal's with each thrust. He didn't need to move, to lift, even to beg; his body was bound in perfect position to accept every thrust of Hannibal's cock.

Hannibal's hands rested on Will's hips, and he pushed against the rig. There was enough give for Hannibal to move Will on his cock, and he eased Will back to meet every thrust. Leaning over, he was able to press his chest against Will's back, his lips could reach Will's neck and throat, and once he was fully seated he moved his hands to stroke along Will's arms. "We can stop," he promised, even if it would be nearly impossible to stop.

"No!" Will had his eyes screwed closed, straining to push back against Hannibal. His body was open and welcoming, and he was feeling completely filled in a way he hadn't felt before. "Please, no, don't."

"I won't." Hannibal kissed the side of Will's neck, pulling the skin between his teeth but not biting down. Instead, he sucked it between his lips and pressed roughly, giving the feel of a bite without actually marking the Omega's neck.

The cry was wordless, but Will's head dropped down, baring the nape of his neck. His shoulders relaxed, and he quit pulling so insistently at the chains. He squeezed against Hannibal's cock, trying to keep it pulled deep inside, not wanting to feel him leaving.

Hannibal's breath caught in his throat at Will's reactions, and he kissed the side of his neck. "Sweet little Omega, you are beautiful like this," he whispered. "Taking all I have to give you, asking for everything, wanting me so much." Each recitation had Hannibal pushing in hard, pulling out quick, and sheathing himself to the hilt. "Do you want my knot, Will?" He was still conscious of the fact that Will did not want to conceive--which was the point of the bench in the first place.

"Yes!" Will's hands balled into fists at the thought of Hannibal denying him, and he couldn't stand it. "Yes, I want it, I *need* it, please, I've been good."

"Ssh, you've been perfect, you've been lovely, little Omega." He bit fully, teeth bared, at the exposed back of Will's neck and gave him a tiny shake. He didn't tear the skin, but the bite would give Will comfort at the same time Hannibal's knot pressed in.
Will's body clung to Hannibal's knot, panting softly at the gentle shake. His stomach quieted almost instantly, chest heaving as he felt Hannibal knotting him and giving him what he needed. He wanted to sob in relief, feeling his chest heaving, and he strained against the cuffs to reach back, touch Hannibal, thank him.

Hannibal stayed pressed against Will, licking the side of his neck and nuzzling his sweaty cheek. "Breathe," he murmured, feeling the tremors racking Will's body. "Slowly, just breathe, I am here for you."

He kept murmuring softly in Will's ear, sometimes in English and sometimes in foreign languages, a soothing and calming litany that helped Will breathe through the panic attack. Hannibal's fingers unfastened the cuffs, massaging each of Will's wrists in turn as they were freed.

Once his arms were free, Will reached blindly behind him, fingers seeking and finding Hannibal's hair. They found and tangled, pulling Hannibal back down to his neck. "You still didn't bite me," he said softly, and his lips trailed tiny kisses along Hannibal's cheek.

"And I won't." Hannibal closed his eyes for the kisses, the random squeezing of Will's muscles around his knot keeping it inflated. "Not until later."

"I want it." He let Hannibal go, and pulled his arms up to pillow his cheek as he got comfortable under Hannibal's warm body spread over his.

As do I, Hannibal thought to himself, but he didn't say anything. He merely rubbed the small of Will's back again, gently soothing the sweaty flesh. Normally he would call for a servant to bring him something to clean his lover with, but he did not want anyone but himself to see William like this, quiet and knotted and loving every moment.

William was exhausted, and the bench had him dozing until he felt Hannibal's knot deflate and slide out of him. As soon as it had, he felt Hannibal kneel behind him, freeing his legs and lastly the binder around his waist. Not a second passed but Hannibal swept Will up in his arms and carried him back to their bed. He didn't argue; his arms went around Hannibal's neck and he held on tight.

Hannibal placed Will in the center of the bed, peeled the sweaty red robe off of him, and dropped the clothes in a basket by the door. The water in the tub was mostly cool, but that was for the better. He dipped a cloth in the water and took it back to the bed.

Will's eyes were only halfway open, and he held his arms out to Hannibal. Hannibal wrapped them around his neck and pulled Will into a sitting position, carefully sponging the sweat and slick from his body. Will purred in contentment, and Hannibal rumbled out an echoing purr from deep in his chest, full of pride that he had bred his Omega into contentment. He wiped every part of Will clean, and then slipped him under the down comforter on the bed.

By the time Will woke in the morning, Hannibal was curled against his back, one arm resting possessively on his hip. He was tucked against the Alpha, and Hannibal's nose was tucked in the nape of his neck. In the room, Will saw the tub had been emptied and refilled with still-steaming water, the red robe had been cleaned and draped over the foot of the bed, alongside Hannibal's black one, and the broken dishes and tray from the night before had been cleaned up and replaced with a fresh tray of hot breakfast dishes.

Hannibal's hand was resting on Will's stomach, and he felt it rumble, more than he heard it, and he cracked open an eye. "I must remember to give Laszlo something quite special," he murmured against Will's skin. "You're hungry; let me get you breakfast."

"Hannibal, it's right there on the sideboard," Will protested, but Hannibal quieted him with a soft growl as he got out of bed. He carried the tray over to Will, and he perched on the side of

the bed as he balanced the tray on his lap, cutting the best parts of the sausage and the bacon away from the rinds and offering the choice cuts to Will on the end of the fork.

Will opened his mouth and took the food gratefully, cleaning the plate and all but licking the fork clean.

"What are we going to do today?" Will asked, watching Hannibal finish the food on the tray, and then looked at the Alpha curiously.

"I am going to be visiting several of the families on my lands, because they have sickness in the house. I will be taking them food, what herbs and medicine I have available, and money enough to hold them until everyone is healthy again. I'd like you to come with me."

"I'd like that." He'd like to see Hannibal in his natural habitat.

Hannibal's answering smile was nearly as bright as the sun coming in the window, and he reached up and pushed one of Will's curls off his forehead.

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The rest of the week passed in a blur of activity; every day was full of Hannibal doing the things necessary to keep not just his castle but his lands running, and Will was included in everything. From visiting the families to judicial matters to household purchases by the steward, Hannibal was careful to make certain Will's voice was heard.

By the end of the week, servants in the castle were just as comfortable addressing Will as they addressed Hannibal, and the people on the lands waved at Will and gave him bows and gifts of fresh milk or cream, cheese and honey, handmade bread just as they offered them to Hannibal.

Six days after Will had first come to the castle, Hannibal smelled it.

The heavy draft of pheromones had finally abated; the first heat had passed.

Will felt it, too. The flush left his skin, the heavy scent of his own body passed, and he caught deep whiffs of sorrow from Hannibal as they walked back to the castle. One little girl had been very ill, and they had visited her every day. She was getting better, now, and Hannibal had mixed medicine with his own hand to try and help her.

"Stay tonight." Hannibal didn't quite make it a question, but it was one that couldn't be ignored. "Rest tonight, make your decision in the morning."

"Yes." That's all Will said as they came back to the castle, and though they went through the same motions as they had all week--dinner, after-dinner socializing with the members of the household, and then bed--it was inescapably different.

They slept in the same bed, but for the first time since his arrival, Hannibal did not touch Will. If Will wanted to initiate it, then he would have gladly taken it, but Will remained quiet and still throughout the night.

In the morning, breakfast was quiet, although Hannibal still fed Will and Will let him do it. Once the meal was over, Hannibal carried the tray to the sideboard, and came back to sit on the bed beside the Omega.

"Would you like to stay? Become my mate, perhaps later my bondmate?"

Will's instinct warred with his brain. His instinct screamed one answer, his mind screamed another, and he looked down at his hands before he looked back up at Hannibal.

"I can't."

End

Reunion

Chapter Summary

William says goodbye to Hannibal and the people of the estate and returns home. But he can't stay away for long when one of the children he met falls ill again.

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay in the chapters. A death in the family and some other real-life issues have been delaying things. Hoping to have the finale added before Christmas.

It was a few hours before the afternoon meal, and Hannibal had made sure that Will was packed. On Will's part, it had felt strange to him, arriving with nothing but the clothes on his back, leaving in those same clothes, but carrying with him a case full of finery--including the scarlet dressing gown that he'd worn every evening in the safety of Hannibal's bedroom. The servants had gathered to say goodbye to him, and even gruff Laszlo looked as if he meant to cry.

Hannibal was speaking to them, and he turned his attention back to where he stood at the head of the hall, in front of the Lord's chair. There was a spot for him--well, for *someone* at Hannibal's side, and he had been sitting there for most of the last week. It felt odd, even now, to see that seat empty and draped in black, almost as if he had died.

"This is a time of celebration!" Hannibal's voice sounded much more effusive than he felt, but for the sake of his little Omega--*for William*, he corrected himself silently, he would be merry and not heartbroken. "Our friend William is leaving us, but we hope it is not permanent. We hope--*I hope*--that he knows he is forever welcome here, and that the doors of the castle are always open to friends. And let it be known here and now that he is indeed, my friend." Scattered applause from those servants not shocked enough to be silent, and Hannibal reminded himself not to be angry. "William, come forward."

Will did as he was asked, coming up from the back of the room and kneeling in front of Hannibal, as he had seen others in the room do.

Reaching down, Hannibal pulled Will up to his feet. "You will never kneel to me again, Will," he said, and then repeated it loudly enough to be heard throughout the room. Once Will was on his feet, Hannibal squeezed his shoulder and then let go quickly. "We have presents for you, my friend. Gifts as promised."

The end of the table had several packages there, and Will wanted to refuse. He didn't want gifts, he simply wanted to leave. He wanted to forget the stricken look on Hannibal's face when he'd refused the Alpha's mating. He wanted to forget the darkening of those enchanting eyes with tears he'd never let fall. He wanted to forget the feeling of being packed full and held tenderly by the Alpha, and most of all, he wanted to forget the fact that Hannibal had ever asked him in the first place.

"Thank you, Hannibal," he said softly, and went to look at each package. The first was a fur cape, very similar to the black cape that Hannibal and most of the people on his lands wore.

"This is from the families of the sick you visited. You brought warmth and joy into their homes, and so they wished to repay you in kind, by sending their warmth with you," Hannibal said, and the words had a ring of ceremony to them.

Will swung the cape around his shoulders, and was not surprised to find it fit perfectly. "I will have to find a way to thank them before I go."

"Wear it as you leave, and you will honor their gift," is all Hannibal said.

Will opened the other packages, finding gifts and tokens from those he had helped Hannibal hear judgments on, from other homes he'd visited with Hannibal, but the last package jingled and rattled. The leather pouch was heavy with coin, and Will peeked inside.

That was easily the entire worth of Will's family, at least once over if not more. There were a few precious stones, uncut, and on the top of the bag shone a red ruby. He pulled it out of the bag and looked at Hannibal questioningly.

From inside his shirt, Hannibal lifted a heavy gold medallion, and in the center of it, a faceted ruby that was the match to the one in Will's hand. "This is the seal of my office, and had you said yes, one would have been made for you with that stone," he explained quietly. "As it stands now, it is a valuable part of your dowry. There is enough there to ensure you have your choice of Alphas."

"I can't accept this." Will dropped the stone back into the bag, and pushed it towards Hannibal.

"You must. It is tradition, William. It is my way of providing a good match for you, and with that comes the guarantee of my personal intercession, should it become necessary, to obtain that match for you." The words were hard to get out, but they were merely echoes of things he had told the boy during their first few nights together. "All others I chose were given dowries as well."

"I would imagine not the equal to this, though," Will pointed out. "It's too much, Hannibal."

"No, it isn't enough. I would give my entire treasury if I thought you would take it." A clearing of his throat. "The coins in that bag, along with what they represent--a connection, a friendship to the lord of the land--will give you an advantage in choosing a mate. Your family is already prosperous, and you bring additional wealth of your own into the marriage. That the wealth is yours is important; though it is your dowry, it is also your wealth. You will not

be dependent on your Alpha to provide for you. You will also bring prestige and the whiff of nobility in the form of your friendship to me. At your intercession, I would gladly make some small gestures towards your intended to smooth the path to the wedding. These are all things that are of great value when searching for your mate."

Hannibal was still trying to teach him. William closed his fist tightly around the edges of the ruby, feeling them cut into his skin without being sharp enough to draw blood. He knew that he could even now change his answer, and Hannibal would turn this into a mating feast, bring everyone from the lands in to share in their good fortune, then sweep him back off to the bedroom for the actual mating.

"You're too generous, Hannibal. Someone could take advantage of you." That thought worried William for some reason, but Hannibal's answer surprised him.

"I fear they already have. Please, allow me to do this one final thing for you. Take what is offered, in the spirit of friendship, and know I want only the best for you."

"Hannibal…" He sighed. "All right. If that will make you feel better, then I will accept it in the spirit that it is given."

"Thank you; it would make me feel very content to know that you are being well looked after." That was about as non-committal as he could make it. "And that you will have your pick of mates."

Will was going to say something more, he didn't know what, but Hannibal didn't give him a choice. He swept back to the top of the room, taking a seat in the oversized almost-throne of a chair. "Let the farewell feast commence!"

Will noticed that Hannibal didn't eat. A platter was served and taken to him; Will could see Laszlo whispering in the Lord's ear, but Hannibal waved him away gently and sent the full tray with him. He did accept a goblet of wine, and a young boy of about nine or ten stayed close with a bottle of wine to keep the Lord's cup full.

He even caught Hannibal slipping the child a gold coin every time he poured, and the boy grinned at the clink of money in his pocket.

Will himself ate sparingly; with a tight throat and a roiling belly, he had little appetite. But he tasted everything put before him at least once. They were all the things he'd grown to enjoy here, made special for him.

The little boy brought the wine to Will, and offered to fill his glass from the Lord's bottle. Will realized that wasn't a privilege offered to anyone else, and he let the boy do it, then took a coin from his bag. But the boy refused it. "Mother and Father said you helped make my sister better, thank you. Mother said this would be your mating feast and that's why I was to come and help, but I just wanted to say I served wine to the man who helped to save my sister."

Will remembered him then, when he mentioned his sick sister, and he recalled the boy's solemn face at his sister's bedside. "Jarik, right?"

"Yes, sir!" His face lit up with being remembered, and he filled Will's wineglass to the brim before darting back off to Hannibal's side.

Mother said this would be your mating feast. That just made Will feel worse. He was glad when the meal was over, and the doors to the great hall were opened.

Outside, down the length of the hall, all the way to the front gate, the people of Hannibal's land had lined either side of the keep's hallway to say goodbye to the young man they'd grown to respect and like.

Laszlo and two other men carried the valise and the gifts, and Will made sure to drape the fur cape about his shoulders on the way out. It was warm, and fit him well, and felt like a lead weight. Their consideration was a gift he felt highly unworthy of.

It was nightfall before he reached home, and he'd refused to let Laszlo or the others carry his things for him. As soon as they'd gotten outside the keep, William had taken the bag full of gifts, including the dowry, and his case of clothing, and sent them back inside. As he'd disappeared into the forest, he looked back one time, and wished he hadn't.

Hannibal had been standing alone on the lower parapet of the wall, and he'd raised one hand to Will in farewell, then faded back into the shadows of the keep.

He hadn't looked back again.

He knocked on the door of his home, knowing it would be already sealed against night, and wasn't surprised when it was his father that answered. "Hello, Father."

"William!" The man embraced his son tightly. "Come in, my boy. I'm very glad to see you, are you well?"

Once Will was inside, he opened his arms to his father's embrace. "I'm fine, father," he said softly. A part of him resented his father, for the frightful things he'd told Will before his visit to Hannibal's castle. But he said nothing about it. "His Lordship was kind, nothing like I was afraid of, and he has released me."

That was a weight off the old man's shoulders. "You didn't conceive, then?"

"No." He didn't know if he had or not; he didn't care. If he found out later he had, then he would deal with it then. "Hannibal wouldn't have let me go if I had." Which was the reason he was certain he had not.

Father's eyebrows rose, but he said nothing to that. "Here, have you eaten? Let me--"

"I'm not hungry." Which was true; Will wanted nothing more than to go upstairs to his bedroom and lay in the familiar bed.

"At least let me help you carry--"

"No, I can manage." He didn't really want his father seeing the things he'd been given. Not because he was ashamed of them, but because he didn't want his father shamed, seeing the extravagance. He would have to tell him about the dowry in the morning, however. "Can we talk in the morning, Father?"

"Of course, son." William's father watched him ascend the stairs, arms full of the heavy load he'd come into the house with. Something had changed in his son; perhaps it was only the maturation of his first heat and his experiences with his Lordship, but his carriage was straighter, his shoulders stronger, and his attitude that of a man who expected respect. Still an Omega, but not the frightened lad that had left over a week ago.

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It was three days before he would have the chance to speak to his son. The first day, Will was up at daybreak and had eaten a quick breakfast in the kitchen. By the time his father had come down, Will was already in the stable and saddling his horse, and by the time he'd made it to the stable, he could just see Will riding alongside the fence that circled their lands.

The Omega had been awake all night. Will hadn't realized it, but he'd grown so used to curling beside Hannibal that sleeping alone was uncomfortable. He'd found himself reaching out to touch Hannibal's face only to find a pillow instead. And his body was hungry; he had gotten quite accustomed to Hannibal's knot whenever he wanted it, and now he felt hollow.

But I am free, and slave to no Alpha! And a tiny part of him wondered if that freedom were actually worth it. Because he knew heats were not a one-time thing. It would happen again and again, and during his next heat, he wouldn't have Hannibal to rely on. A niggling quiet voice in the back of his head whispered that if he'd stayed with Hannibal, he wouldn't have to worry about his next heat. He'd have an Alpha to care for him.

I don't need to be taken care of. By now, Will knew this was his pride talking, and he knew what a lie it was. After having Hannibal take care of him, William knew just how much he yearned for it.

But this habit, riding and checking the borders, was something that he had done with Hannibal, and the familiarity of doing it, even without the Alpha, was reassuring. They had no real tenants, not like the Lord's land, but a few of the men who manned the boats for his father had homes and families here. Will made sure to visit each of them, meeting wives and children and elderly parents. They all seemed to be slightly surprised, and after some gentle questioning and reassurance, he'd found out that his father only made these checks once or twice a year, and always alone.

They were not lacking anything, because Master Graham was quite generous in paying their husbands and children, but seeing the Master's son, that was a great kindness they didn't expect. What had been routine for Hannibal was a special treat here, and that was unsettling. Will promised to make the rounds again tomorrow, and he was given lunch at one of the houses because he'd lost track of time.

"Why isn't a young man like you beating the Alphas away with a stick?" asked one elderly mother. "Those idiot guildmasters."

Will laughed and blushed. "Marry off your own sons, old mother," he teased gently, giving her the respected title that Hannibal had given many of the women on his estate.

The elderly woman cackled with glee and patted Will on the arm. She was delighted to have met the young Omega, and he was just as kind and beautiful as had been rumored. "They are married! I have nothing else to do with my time but marry off everyone else's sons! Don't you worry, sweet William, we'll find you an Alpha in no time."

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Jarik ran back into the courtyard, skidding to a halt just in front of the door and slowed to a panting walk.

Laszlo happened to be passing in front of the door, and he recognized the boy from the feast. "You, son, what's the hurry?"

"I must speak with his Lordship, it's my sister! She's failing again, Mother sent me to beg the Lord for the medicine he brought before!" He was bracing his hands on his thighs, heaving in deep breaths as he spoke.

"Go and bring his Lordship here," Laszlo ordered, and he brought the boy into the hall, and sat him in one of the chairs. "Catch your breath, do you need something to drink?"

The boy shook his head, and Hannibal came striding into the hall and knelt in front of the boy's chair. "Tell me, Jarik."

"It's my sister, she's taken ill again. The medicine you brought helped, but only for awhile. She's sick again."

Hannibal's clasped fingers pressed against his lips. "Run home to your mother and ask her to boil a cauldron of water for me. I will be there shortly with everything I have. Tomorrow morning, I will send the apothecary from the next village over, and he will bring more."

The boy tried to shove gold coins into his hands, but Hannibal closed the boy's fingers around them. "No, Jarik. Those are yours, they belong to you. Run along now, and do what I've asked."

"Thank you, sir!" Jarik departed at a full run.

Laszlo remained by his Lord's side. "What is it, Master?"

"I miss Will." He got back to his feet, and put a hand on the old man's shoulder. "Go to my room and bring out my herbal box. Meet me in the kitchen."

"Yes, sir." Laszlo hurried off, worried about his Master. On his way, he stopped one of the younger house boys. "Tell me something, do you know where the Graham estate is? The fisher merchant?" At the boy's nod, he smiled. "Take one of the horses, tell Malory I sent you, and ride over to the estate, and tell young William that Jarik's sister has taken ill again and is asking for him." The boy ran off, and Laszlo continued on his mission.

He met Hannibal in the kitchen, and slid the box over to his master. Hannibal had a silver knife ready, and started chopping and mincing what he required to make the potion for the sick girl. "Laszlo, take one of the messenger birds and send a request to the apothecary in the next city. Tell him to bring his entire store, and I will pay him for everything, used or not."

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you, Laszlo." He squeezed the man's shoulder again, and went back to his work. It didn't take him long to finish preparing the potion, and he poured the mixture into a leather bag. The bag got tucked in his pocket, and he swung his cape around his shoulders as he headed out to the stable.

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It was nearly nightfall when the young man reached the Graham estate, and he banged on the door loudly.

Will answered the banging, and was surprised to see the boy. He didn't know the name, but recognized him as being from Hannibal's estate. "You, you're one of Hannibal's young men, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir, Master Will. Jarik's sister, she's ill again, and she's asking for you." That was his message, and he fell silent after delivering it.

Will took the boy to the kitchen, and asked the cook to make sure he had something hot to eat before letting him go back to the Lord's estate. Then he found his father in the library. "Father, I have to go. One of the children I met is sick and is asking for me. I'll be back when I can."

Picking up his cape from the pegs by the door, Will wrapped it around his shoulders as he ran for the stable.

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Hannibal was surprised to see a horse already tied outside of the house, and he tied his own beside it. His nose twitched; he caught a hint of Will's scent, and he put his hand on the neck of the horse. It whickered softly, and the saddle smelled of nothing but Will.

William Graham was in that house already.

Straightening his shoulders, Hannibal knocked on the door.

The girl's mother answered, and she nearly fell into Hannibal's arms. "Oh, thank you, my Lord. You sent your young friend to sit with us until you could come, that made Sofia and Jarik both laugh."

Hannibal had meant to protest that he hadn't sent for Will, didn't know how he knew, but it was obvious that Will's presence was bringing the family a great deal of comfort. So Hannibal merely gave her arm a squeeze and headed into the house. "Hello, Sofia."

"Hannibal!" Sofia was young enough yet that he had given her permission to call him by name. "Look who is here!"

"Hello, William." Hannibal knelt by the girl's bedside. "I hear that you are not feeling well again."

"It hurts, in the same place." Hannibal lay his hand on Sofia's side. "Yes, right there."

"Hello, Hannibal." Will stroked Sofia's forehead. "Don't you worry, Sofia. Lord Hannibal there is going to make you better if he can." He avoided Hannibal's eyes, though he could feel them watching him.

"Yes, I'm going to do my best to take care of you." He took the leather pouch out of his cape pocket, and gave it to the mother. "Pour the whole pouch into the boiling water. Ladle a cup out once it's boiled and mixed, and give it to her. Give her a cupful every morning and evening. You should have enough there for several days, and the apothecary is coming tomorrow to bring more. Don't worry; I have made arrangements with him. He will bring you everything you need, and he will look at Sofia while he is here. She may need more help than I can give; she may require a surgeon. If that is the case, send Jarik for me. I will come and make arrangements at once."

The mother's face fell at the mention of Sofia needing a surgeon. "But we cannot--"

"I can." Both William and Hannibal answered with the same words at the same time. But Hannibal continued on solo. "I can and I will. You don't need to worry about that; it is my responsibility to take care of all of you."

"Mine, too." William came up behind Hannibal and put a hand on the lord's shoulder. "Maybe I was only here for a short time, but you were all kind to me, and I feel a responsibility to all of you. I'll help, too."

Hannibal smiled over his shoulder at Will, proud that the young man had taken such a responsibility and such a liking to the people of his lands. All the more reason he would have made a wonderful mate, and Hannibal forced himself to stop thinking like that. Will had rejected him, but that didn't mean they could not be friends, perhaps.

"Master William, Lord Hannibal, if there's any way we can repay you--"

Hannibal cut the woman off in mid-sentence. "You owe me nothing. Just keep watch over your little girl."

Will nodded his agreement. "Hannibal is right. We're just here to help you. I'll be back in the morning to see how you're doing."

After a few more moments of gratitude from the mother, both men disentangled themselves from her, and left the small cottage. Standing back to back, they prepared their mounts for their trips home.

"Why don't you stay at the keep tonight?" Hannibal offered. "It is much closer than your home, and should anything happen in the night, you will be close by."

Will nearly declined the offer, but in the end, "Yes, thank you. That'd be nice, Hannibal."

"It'd be my pleasure. As soon as we're back, I'll have one of the servants open one of the guest rooms for you, and arrange something for you to eat." He mounted the chestnut stallion and flicked the reins, making the horse paw the earth.

"What if I want to stay with you?" Will mounted his horse as well, looking across at the lord.

"I'm sorry, but I would have to decline. You are no longer my charge, and it would be inappropriate for us to share a bed." Hannibal patted his stallion's neck. "If you like, I can have your room be the closest to mine, if that would make you more comfortable." He tried not to show that he was waiting for Will's answer with his breath caught in his throat.

to be concluded...

Mated

Chapter Summary

In which William returns to the keep with Hannibal, and they finally have it out between them.

Chapter Notes

Happy Christmas! By the skin of my teeth, I got it done before Christmas! I'm (not) sorry that it grew an extra chapter, and this one is a little longer than the others, but only by a teeny bit. For anyone who was worried, it is Happily Ever After. Many thanks to everyone who has read, commented, and liked the story! Hope you enjoy the final chapter!

The bedroom across from Hannibal's suite was possibly the most luxurious, besides the suite itself. It wasn't quite as large, and it wasn't equipped with as big a fireplace, but the window looked out over the back gardens, and instead of a giant claw-foot tub, a smaller and less ornate cast iron tub sat in front of the fire. There was no real seating area--but there was a small sitting room down the hallway that Will had been welcomed to use.

It felt strange to be lying in this bed, by himself, in the familiar keep.

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William's return to the castle was met with a quiet surprise and wonderment. Laszlo was standing by the inner gate, beaming brightly as the two men rode in together, side by side. He held the reins of both horses while they dismounted, and Hannibal took the old man by the shoulder. "Our friend is going to be staying the evening with us. Please see that the guest chamber across from mine is properly prepared, and send word to the kitchen."

The old man tried not to cackle. "Of course, my lord. Welcome back, Master William."

"Thank you, Laszlo," Will said softly, smiling softly at the servant's obvious enthusiasm.

"Follow me, please." Hannibal led the way through the halls, boot heels clicking on the stone floor. "I saw that you were wearing your cape today." But he kept walking, as though he didn't expect an answer. "I was also quite glad to see you sitting with Sofia. She is not your responsibility, and yet, you were there. Thank you."

Will shook his head as they walked. "They were all kind to me; I'm glad to have the chance to return that kindness."

Hannibal paused fractionally by the door to his bedroom, but kept walking until they were at a private reception room. He entered first, and by the time Will came in, Hannibal had poured a savory cider into a pair of wood and horn mugs from a kettle by the fireplace. "If I remember correctly, you became quite fond of our cider here."

Will took the mug gratefully, letting the scent of apples and mulled spices surround him as he took a sip. The warmth spread through his body, and he sighed. Though Hannibal's tone was easy and measured, every word sounded like an accusation. Was it really only a day or two since he'd left the keep? It felt like years.

"I became fond of a lot of things here," Will admitted.

"The household became quite fond of you as well," Hannibal answered easily. "It has been… different, since you left."

"Different how?" Will sipped from the mug again as he asked the question.

In truth? Quieter. Less lively. Hannibal himself was growing more melancholy since Will had left, and it was infiltrating the entire keep. "Slower."

That made William grin honestly. "I have a hard time imagining that. There was always something to do when I was here."

How to explain that Hannibal had made an effort to make it happen that way? That he'd gone out of his way to include Will in everything, to give him a glimpse of the life they could have had together? "As I said. Without you here, things have been different," was all he explained.

"There'll be another Omega in heat somewhere soon," Will said, aiming for calm and even, but coming off jealous.

"No. I have done with that, and made it known through my lands that I will entertain no one else." Hannibal was looking into the fireplace as he said that, and he missed the double-take.

Will's eyes widened, and he stared at Hannibal as he digested that. "You can't!" he burst out.

"I most certainly can, and have."

"No, I mean you *can't.* What you taught me, Hannibal, it was invaluable. I don't know what I'd do without it, and you can't stop teaching other people what you've shown me." Will was a little passionate about it. "You can't stop, people need you. Need what you do."

"There are other Alphas, William, and I have no urge to entertain others." *Not after you* was the implication, and Hannibal let it remain unspoken. "I am getting of the age where I will either settle for a mate, or remain alone. The constant merry-go-round of affection and lack of it is… tiring."

"You aren't that old," Will scoffed. "You're what, barely forty?"

Hannibal's lips curved into a small smile. "Thank you ever so much for the compliment, dear boy. I am, in fact, fifty-one years of age. I have perhaps two decades left to me, and I have no urge to spend them with progressively younger Omegas who will expect more from me than I can provide. You are my final masterpiece, and I prefer to end it on a high note, rather than a low." As he called Will his masterpiece, Hannibal let his fingers trail over Will's cheekbone, then drop quickly.

Will tried to turn into the nuzzling caress, frustrated when Hannibal's hand moved too quickly. "Settle for a mate?"

"I will no longer seek a bonding," Hannibal answered casually. "I will settle for an Omega that is willing to share my bed and bear me an heir, and that is all I shall ask of them."

No. No, no, and no. Will shook his head wildly. "You're being an idiot, Hannibal." The lord was still handsome and virile, and would be a prize any Omega would be lucky to have. "You're giving up already and--"

"Excuse me, sirs, but dinner is ready." Laszlo's interruption cut off whatever insult Will was about to give. "Master William, your Lordship."

"Thank you, Laszlo. I believe I shall retire after dinner; could you see to it that baths are drawn in both chambers?" Hannibal rose from his chair and swept imaginary dust from his trousers. "I believe you remember the way?" he added, holding out his hand to indicate that Will should precede him.

"Yes, thank you."

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Dinner had been a quiet affair, much different from the boisterous meals he remembered just days ago. The food was just as elegant, just as delicious, but the atmosphere was somber and quiet. It didn't seem like the same household at all, and the food stuck in his throat with every bite.

After dinner, Hannibal did retire to his bedroom, and Will found him there reading. He was wearing a pair of round reading glasses, and when he saw Will standing in the doorway, he tucked a velvet shred between the pages and folded his glasses on top of the book. "William."

"Hannibal, I meant what I said before. I didn't mean it quite so horribly, but I'm serious when I say that you've got a lot to teach people like me. And I'm not just talking about the sexual parts." He was able to say that without blushing--thanks to Hannibal. "I'm talking about the life part of it. Explaining what a mating is, what a bonding is, what adult life expects from you, how to find your place in a household. Why it's good to have your own wealth, what it means to be a leader, to take care of people. There are other Alphas, yes. But none of them do what you do, and you can't stop."

Hannibal sighed, and put the book to the side. "My heart is no longer in it, William. I could not do any better than I did with you; if you think what I have taught is so valuable, you pass

it on. Find other Omegas and show them what you know. You may not be able to fill their sexual needs, but you can pass on the things that you have learned from me."

"No. Because the sexual needs are a part of it, too. You showed me that my father was wrong, that he told me things that were not true, that he made me afraid of something that I should have had no fear about. With you, because of you, I found that I didn't need to be scared. Not of you, not of what we did, not of the urges I felt. Not of my feelings, not in the least." He paused for a deep breath. "Maybe other Omegas know more. Maybe they've already been knotted by their chosen Alphas. But maybe they haven't been. Maybe they're like me--"

"No, William. No one is like you." He put the book he'd been reading on the table, and sighed. "When you came to me, untouched and unspoiled, I knew that there was no one like you. You were afraid, but it didn't stop you from speaking your mind. You weren't a passive learner; you asked things of me, you initiated sex when you wanted it, and you made such an effort to participate in the world around you. While you were here, I made an effort to include you in everything, to show you what kind of life you could have. You wanted to learn, so I taught you."

"You offered it, and I took it." Will looked earnestly at Hannibal. "You can't stop. And you shouldn't settle."

"What I do or do not do is no longer anything you should worry about," Hannibal reminded gently. "Outside of the bounds of our friendship, that is, which I do appreciate. And you have fulfilled that obligation, which pleases me. Rarely is friendship offered by the lord sincerely returned." He got to his feet then. "But there is nothing that can change my mind." As he walked by William, he squeezed the young man's shoulder in obvious affection. "Sweet dreams, Will."

Even though it was Hannibal's bedroom, he left Will there, sitting by the fire.

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"His Lordship's been quiet since you left." Laszlo was carrying hot water into William's bedroom when Will came into the room. "Lots of people in the household have been. Nobody really thought you'd be leaving."

"I didn't either." Will sighed, and sat on the side of the bed. "Is there a way to send a message to my father? I'd like to let him know I'm sleeping here tonight so that he doesn't worry."

"Course, we've got a few boys around who're always willing to take a message. I'll fetch you one, paper too."

"Thank you, Laszlo."

"If you need anything else, just ask. You're still our guest." A shake of his head, and he walked from the room, back straight as he hauled the empty buckets. "Bath's ready for you, Master William."

Will decided to wait his bath until after he'd written a letter to his father.

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Dear Father,

I'm writing to let you know that I am spending the night at the Lord's keep. One of the young girls I met during my time with Hannibal has grown ill again, and has asked for me. The apothecary is coming to see her tomorrow, and I have promised to stay until we know what is happening. I may not be home tomorrow night, either, which saddens me because we should say these things face to face. But perhaps it is better if I write them to you, so that I can better collect my thoughts.

I am angry with you, Father. The things that you told me before my first heat, the fears that you put into my head, they were wrong. Hannibal was neither mean nor cruel; there was nothing to fear from him or from my own body. The urges that I felt, before the heat, during and after, are natural things, and Hannibal taught me how to understand those feelings so that they could be handled appropriately. Sex is nothing to be afraid of.

I was not a slave. Hannibal didn't want to enslave me; if anything, he was my slave. He bent over backwards to serve my needs, sexually and otherwise. He fed me from his plate, with his own hands, gave me a chair beside his own, allowed me to participate in the daily routine of his home. My thoughts were given weight, my desires answered, my opinions solicited and acknowledged. I was treated like an adult.

I understand that Mother hurt you. I'm sorry about that. But just because I am an Omega like her, does not mean that I am going to be like her. I know you don't wish for me to leave your home; the time is coming where I must. You made me afraid of Hannibal, Father, and I am angry about that.

It was my choice to say no to his proposal; he asked me to mate him. Not bonded to him, not yet, maybe not ever if I didn't feel it. He merely asked me to be his mate, and I said no. That is a decision I am coming to regret. But I said no because I was afraid. I was afraid because of what you had told me; I was forever afraid of losing myself because you told me how the Lord would force himself on me and take away everything that makes me who I am.

Mother did that to you. Hannibal had no intention of doing that to me. I'm sorry, Father, that she hurt you. I'm sorry that she made you become someone else for her, and I am sorry that she left the both of us. But of all the things Hannibal taught me, he has taught me to be strong. He has shown me, ironically, that I am my own man, and that I am capable.

I love him, Father. I loved him when I said no, I loved him when I left, I loved him while I was home, and I love him now. If he will have me, I will say yes this time. I don't know if he will still have me. But I will find out. I want your blessing, but if I cannot have it, I will be satisfied with your silence.

I love you, Father. I am in all other things your loyal son,

William S. Graham.

Will folded the parchment pages together, and used the elaborate seal provided to mark the wax that held the letter closed. He wrote his father's name on the front of the packet, and gave the letter to the young boy waiting for it. "Here, take this to my father's house, and put it in his hands. When the door is answered, ask if he is Michael, and give it to him only. Repeat that."

"Take it to your home, ask for Michael, and put it in his hands only, no one else," parroted the boy.

"Yes, thank you." Will gave the boy two gold coins, and ruffled his hair. "That's for you, because it is late tonight and travel is unpleasant. He will probably tip you as well."

"Thank you, sir!" The boy pocketed the coins, and darted out.

Will undressed and slowly sank into the tub, luxuriating in the warm water. He rolled a cloth and tucked it behind his neck, letting his head lean back and closing his eyes. He'd told his father that he was going to say yes to Hannibal, but how in the hell was he going to convince Hannibal to ask him?

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It was deep in the night when Will got out of his bed and padded across the hall. Hannibal's door was unlocked but closed, and he pushed it open. Hannibal was lying awake in bed, watching the door open. "Come in, Will."

"How did you know it was me?" Will came into the bedroom and closed the door behind him, and pulled one of the chairs over to sit by the foot of Hannibal's bed.

"No one else would dare," he said, and his grin was tiny but there. "You didn't bother knocking, just assumed you would be welcome, which you are."

Will inclined his head. "It feels wrong to be in the bedroom alone."

Hannibal merely looked at Will for a long moment. "It would be--"

"Inappropriate, I know. I'm not certain that I care." Will stretched his legs out in the chair, and then sat up straight. "In fact, I'm positive I don't care."

"I do, though. I care for your reputation even if you do not. That you come to my room in the dark of night is inappropriate enough, but were you to stay the night…"

"I don't understand," Will finally said. "It's known that we were lovers, as you were to all Omegas who came to you and were chosen. Why would it matter now?"

"Because now you are my guest, not my charge," Hannibal explained patiently. "You came here on your own, and you are protected by the cloak of my hospitality. For me to take advantage of that reflects badly on me, and on you as well. You are not my charge, nor are you my mate. You have no claim on me, nor I on you. Were you to come to my bed, whether you wanted it or not, you would be considered not mate material."

"I don't care." Will was reckless; after he'd sent the letter to his father, he was almost dizzy with the realization of what he'd written. Seeing the words in his own hand; *I love him, Father* had been the key to opening a dam he didn't even realize had been locked.

"But I care about you, Will. I care about your future. I want--" Hannibal was struck wordless by Will's next words.

"I want my future to be with you." When Hannibal had no words of protest, Will plowed ahead. "I was wrong when I said no. I was afraid of what it meant for myself, that I would somehow lose who I am in who you are. But almost as soon as I said it, I knew I was wrong. You would not let that happen to me."

"No, I would not." Hannibal's agreement was quiet, and his face was grave. "I care about you, Will. And I don't think--"

"I don't care what you think." More strength was behind that declaration than Will even realized he had. "Hannibal, I want you to be my mate. I want your teeth in my neck, I want my teeth in your skin. I wanted it when we were together and you wouldn't give it to me. Give it to me now. We can wake up in the morning mated, and have the ceremony for the household."

Hannibal was dumbstruck, staring at Will sitting ramrod straight at the foot of the bed. A deep breath of his scent proved he wasn't lying, because he was a mix of desperation and want and resolve. "This is highly irregular," he murmured softly. "I should be the one proposing to you."

"We'll tell the rest of the world--"

"Exactly what has happened," Hannibal interrupted. "You are…exquisite, William, and I will not have you diminished. I will be proud to have it known that you asked for my hand, and not the other way around." He scooted over, leaving the warm space open for his Omega and pulled the blankets back.

Will almost dove into the bed beside Hannibal, curling up in the warmth of Hannibal's body and pressing close to him. For the first time since he'd come back to the keep, it felt like he could properly breathe again. His arms wrapped around his Alpha's chest, cheek resting on his stomach. Hannibal's fingers found Will's hair and stroked gently, pressing kisses to the top of his head. "So you're saying yes, you'll mate me?" Will asked into Hannibal's skin.

"Yes. I'm saying yes, I would be honored to mate you." Hannibal brought his arms down and around Will, hauling him up so that they were level together, face to face and shoulder to shoulder, snuggled together with no space between them. "And to bond with you, if you wish it."

"I do, I wish it greatly." Will squeezed Hannibal tightly. "I wrote a letter to my father tonight, and I told him that I loved you. That I was sorry I declined your proposal before, and that if you would say yes, I would mate you as soon as you wanted. And now I need to tell you."

"No you don't." Hannibal kissed William's face softly, then pressed a kiss to his lips. "You don't have to tell me anything." His nostrils flared. "Your scent tells me everything I need to hear."

Will moved into the kiss, deepening it when Hannibal stopped talking. "I want you, Hannibal. You want me, too."

"More than I can actually say," Hannibal admitted, stroking his fingertips over Will's face. "If you will be my mate, you will never want for anything. You are already part of our home and our lives here, and I would be honored to make that permanent."

Will smiled gently. "Yes, please. But Hannibal?"

"Yes?" He tilted his head to regard his mate. And oh, how he adored the sound of that thought in his head. His mate.

"If you don't give me your teeth now, I will bite you myself." Will was almost dizzy with the feelings of heat, want, and need that swirled between them, and their scents were mingling in a heavy cloud of overwhelming desire.

Hannibal kept his head tilted, offering his throat to William's bared teeth. He said nothing else, just waiting, barely breathing.

William struck almost lazily, his teeth sinking into the exposed flesh of Hannibal's neck. A hard bite, blood flowing into his mouth, the feel of skin tearing as he marked his Alpha. His hands braced on Hannibal's chest and shoulder, and he heard a long, satisfied moan sliding out of Hannibal's and vibrating against his lips.

Pulling his head back, his tongue lapped at the few trickles of blood that leaked from the bite mark, and Will admired the imprint of his teeth in Hannibal's neck. His thumb rubbed over the bite mark, and Hannibal shuddered. Licking his thumb, he tilted his head for Hannibal. "Please," he murmured.

Will was quivering, waiting for Hannibal to bite. Instead, Hannibal kissed first, tongue lapping hungrily at his mouth. "I want you first," Hannibal whispered, sliding his hand down to stroke Will's chest. "Take your clothes off."

Will didn't hesitate. He untied the robe he was wearing, and it fell to show that he was gloriously naked underneath. "Your turn."

Hannibal couldn't help the smile; Will had obviously intended this all along, or at least to seduce him into it. "I love you, Will." He got to his feet, and untied his own dressing gown. His chest was bare, but he was wearing a pair of soft linen trousers, and Will's hands tugged the waistband and helped Hannibal pull them off entirely.

"I love you, Hannibal," he said loudly, pulling hard and helping Hannibal get undressed. It wasn't hard; Hannibal had been wearing very little, and what he did have on was gone quickly. Will pushed him back onto the bed, and Hannibal rolled with him until they were face to face. "This is the way I want you. So I can see your face."

Hannibal scented his Omega; he couldn't help it, and he buried his nose in the crook of Will's neck. He yearned to bite, but wanted to wait until they were knotted. "You can have me any way that you want me, little Omega."

He couldn't help the smile Hannibal's words brought to his face, and he leaned in to kiss his mate again. "Knot me," Will pled against his lips. "Make me yours. Mate me."

Gentle hands cupped William's face, held him in the kiss, stroked his cheeks and tangled in his hair. "Yes, yes, and yes," Hannibal promised, his cock already hard and aching to find a home in his mate.

Will rolled onto his back, and pulled Hannibal on top of him, and his slick was already dripping thick and heavy in the air. His skin was glistening with slick and sweat, and Hannibal rubbed the head of his cock through the dripping from Will's opening. The muscle was twitching and open, waiting for Hannibal, and Hannibal didn't hesitate any longer. Looking down at his lover, Hannibal eased his hard cock into Will's opening.

They both moaned softly, Hannibal's eyes closing as he pressed completely into Will's welcoming body. Will groaned at the familiar feeling of Hannibal possessing him, and lifted his legs to wrap around Hannibal's hips. That let Hannibal slip in deeper, and he surged forward, sheathing himself to the hilt. His knot pressed against the outside rim of Will's opening, and Hannibal started rocking his hips.

The rhythm was familiar to Will's body, and he was no longer afraid or ashamed. He lifted his hips to meet Hannibal's thrusts, and his hands linked at the back of Hannibal's neck to pull him down for a kiss. Their lips met in a blur of wet and hot, tongues thrusting and pressing roughly against each other just as their bodies were.

The great headboard creaked as Will braced himself against it, giving himself leverage as he lifted and rocked into Hannibal. The Alpha growled and bared his teeth, pushing Will flatter so that he could completely cover the Omega with his body like a blanket.

The possessive growl had William melting, body becoming pliant under Hannibal's wandering hands. Sweat stung Will's eyes as he bit at Hannibal's lip, licked his chin, mouthed the bright red mark of his teeth in Hannibal's flesh. His own virgin neck was tilted to the side, baring and begging at the same time in wordless pleas of skin and bone.

Hannibal could hold back no longer; a second, throaty growl preceded the lunge, and Hannibal's teeth sunk deep into Will's neck. Will cried out loudly, a sharp, guttural noise that was almost a howl as he felt the victorious Alpha refuse to release his bite. Hannibal's knot pushed into Will's body at the moment of the bite, and Will came hard, untouched.

A satisfied smirk curved Hannibal's red-stained lips as he finally opened his jaw and let Will's flesh bleed freely. His teeth were sharper; the wound was deeper than the one Will had given him, but both would scar satisfactorily. He lapped lazily at the blood, his own orgasm almost an afterthought as his knot inflated and tied them together without notice.

"When we are free, I'll wash you." Hannibal purred softly, rolling onto his side and bringing Will with him, tucked in close and possessively. "In the morning, we'll make the

announcement to the rest of the keep, and then visit Sofia and her family with the apothecary. Should everything go well, the feast will be tonight."

William rested a hand on Hannibal's cheek. "Thank you, my Lord," he said with a playful smile. "For understanding that I had yet one more lesson to learn, and that was to appreciate what was always mine, I first had to be without it."

Hannibal turned into the soft touch and kissed Will's palm. "From the first night, I was yours, and will be yours until the last night of my life." Hannibal's hand came up to rest on Will's wrist, lightly enough to be felt, but not heavily enough to make him drop his arm. "I want you always in my bed, I want you always as my mate, just like you are already in my heart."

Will knew those words had some sort of importance to them, and he was smart enough to guess what it meant. "From the first night, I was yours, and will be yours until the last night of my life. I want you always in my bed, I want you always as my mate, just like you are already in my heart." He reached out and brought Hannibal's hand to his chest, resting it over his heart. Leaning forward, he pressed his hand against Hannibal's heart.

A low-grade current seemed to pass through both men, making Will gasp. It was almost like a circuit completing between them, and Hannibal's eyes widened in surprise. He hadn't expected the bond to actually complete, not so soon, and he hadn't expected Will to echo the words. His breath caught in his throat, and when he brushed the fingers of his other hand over Will's cheek, they both gasped. He could feel the echo of Will's thrill in his own mind, and Will's expression showed that he could feel the same, the echo of Hannibal's exuberance in his.

Hannibal's joyous laughter was met with William's eager kisses, wiggling ever closer despite the fact they were still tied together. William seemed to want to share the same skin, and Hannibal was more than willing. He moved closer to Will, until there was not a shred of space in between them. They lay like that together, gentle touches exploring bits of skin here and there for what seemed like an eternity until Hannibal's knot finally deflated.

As he slipped free, Will dipped his head and lightly sucked one of Hannibal's fingers into his mouth. His teeth dragged along the knuckle, but Hannibal pulled away. "Wait for me."

Rising from the bed, Hannibal took a silver pitcher from the hearth, and dipped a soft washcloth in it. Once the cloth was damp with warm water, he brought it back to the bed and gently cleaned the raw bite on Will's neck. It still oozed a thin trickle of blood, and he patted the wound until the bleeding finally tapered off. Bringing the cloth to his nose, Hannibal inhaled the deep scent of his mate's blood. He did the same to the wound on his own neck, and he trailed his fingers over Will's naked hip. "I wish to give you something."

Tossing the dirty cloth aside, Hannibal opened the drawer of the bedside table, and withdrew the heavy gold medallion of state. The black and red ribbons tangled over Hannibal's fingers, but he smoothed them out as he draped them over Will's head and neck, letting it lay heavy against his chest. "I will have another made for myself, but this one, I wish you to have. As a sign of my affection, it shows you are my mate, but more importantly, my consort and my equal. Will you accept it?"

William's fingers touched the heavy jewelry and the satiny ribbons. "I have nothing to give you in return," he said quietly.

Hannibal's palm pressed against Will's heart, and he brought Will's hand to the bite on his neck. "These are the things you have given me. These are all that I want from you. They are mine now, to protect and cherish, and I swear to you I will do so."

He nodded. "Then yes, I will accept. Not only your token, but everything else that you have offered me."

Hannibal climbed back into bed beside his made, and pulled the blankets up to cover them both. "Of course Laszlo will have a heart attack when he wakes me in the morning," he pointed out with a grin hidden in the nape of Will's neck.

"Or he'll be thrilled and refuse to disturb the newly mated master of the keep," Will suggested, feeling Hannibal's heat at his back and snuggling into the warmth. His fingers wrapped around the heavy medallion as his cheek pillowed on Hannibal's arm. "I don't think anyone will be surprised."

Hannibal actually agreed. "Sleep, little Omega." He purred deep in his chest.

William's eyes grew heavy at the purr. "Oh, that's a dirty trick, Hannibal."

His smile widened against Will's neck, and he nuzzled in close. "Sleep, and dream sweetly."

"You as well," William answered, yawning softly and snuggling his cheek against his mate's bicep.

There was no reply necessary, mostly because Hannibal's dreams had already come true.

The End

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